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From Hell to Paradise?

**Roma Asylum Seekers from the Former Czechoslovakia in
the Northeast of England: Migration and Identities**

Submitted by:

Jana Tikalová

For

Master of Arts in Anthropology by Research

University of Durham

Department of Anthropology

2003



DECLARATION

10 NOV 2003

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Thesis submitted by Jana Tikalova, Department of Anthropology. June 2003.

Abstract

Between 1997-1998, mass migrations entitled a 'Roma exodus' from the Czech and Slovak Republics to Canada and the United Kingdom occurred. The host countries were presented, mainly through the media, as 'welcoming' asylum seekers. Roma had decided to join the migratory journey to ease the discrimination experienced in the Czech and Slovak lands, seeking protection of their rights under the label of 'political asylum seekers'. This thesis uses the anthropology sub-disciplines of migration and economics to explore the 'asylum' lives of Roma from the former Czechoslovakia in the Northeast of England during the years 2001-2003. It focuses on the way in which old identities are reawakened and new ones created.

From a population of 150 in the Northeast of England, 26 Roma asylum seekers from both the Czech and Slovak Republics were interviewed between October 2001 to early February 2003. Nine of these became key informants and were informally interviewed in their temporary homes. Many Roma asylum seekers were subsequently deported. Only one family was granted asylum. From these informants, data on understanding and circumventing governmental control, restrictions and restraints, perceptions of the UK as 'Paradise', comprehension of the voucher scheme for refugees as a means of payment (legalised in April 2000), stigmatization and development of social and cultural relations, and information on economic networks, were obtained.

Roma asylum seekers conducted their migratory journey imagining that it would lead to a happier life. Instead, they experienced racial discrimination, humiliation, fear, and they were constantly threatened with deportation. Thus, the migration journey led not to a contented integration, but to a frightening alienation. This thesis shows how the Roma responded differently to this process of alienation, producing a range of identities that varied from one individual to another. It demonstrates how attempts to apply a single identity to this group produce false stereotypes.

In loving memory of my father who will never be able to read this piece of
work that kept me away from home in the last moments of his life.

To my beloved mother and stepmother.

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The idea for this research project originated during my five month-long Erasmus study experience in Stockton Campus (today’s Queen Campus) University of Durham in 2001, when I first met Roma asylum seekers in the Teesside area in the Northeast of England. I was enrolled for the M.A. Programme by research at the University of Durham the following academic year with the great support from the dean of the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Western Bohemia in Pilsen (Czech Republic), a great and modest anthropologist Ivo Budil, to whom I owe my gratitude for bringing anthropology into my life.

My deepest thanks go to my supervisor in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Durham, Tamara Kohn. Her endless guidance, detailed attention to my drafts, and practical help accompanied me during my fieldwork. Her intellectual support, rich fieldwork experience and anthropological insights supported my work enormously. I would particularly like to acknowledge my external advisor, James Carrier, and his extremely useful comments and directions. His sharp mind and understanding of economic anthropology enriched my work immensely. Both Tamara and James were there whenever I needed. They followed my work over the course of the research and writing process. I am indebted also to Paul Saint Cassia from the Anthropology Department at Durham who volunteered to comment on my work during my supervisors’ research leave. Paul’s bright ideas strengthened the process of putting my fieldwork experience into writing. All these ‘born’ anthropologists gave me enormous support in both theory and practice, and they have opened an endless chapter in my life – making me become a real anthropologist and researcher who applies the discipline in everyday life.

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http://bbc.news.co.uk/hi/english/in_depth/uk/2001/destiantion_uk

...this is, after all, the century of the migrant as well as the century of the bomb, perhaps, there have never been so many people who end up elsewhere than they began, whether by choice or by necessity and so perhaps that's the source from which this kind of reconstruction can begin.

(Salman Rushdie, 1987, p. 63 cited in Bottomley 1992:3)

CHAPTER I.: Introduction and Methodology

'Velvet' Revolution [in 1989] has, it appears, been followed by Velvet Divorce [in 1993]

Powell 1997

1 We Need More Sweets from the West, Not the Bitter Political Power from the East!

It is arduous to describe what it is like to grow up in a country with a communist regime. You were afraid to be late in a shop in order to buy a loaf of bread and a bottle of milk for your children before they ran out of groceries. If you had friends in the food industry you were lucky to get some 'under-the-counter' goods. As a little girl I could not wait to unwrap chewing gum from the 'West' and bananas imported from tropical countries under our natural Christmas tree. Even though my father was a talented lawyer with many contacts in my country and abroad, it took extraordinary effort to apply for a tourist visa for Eastern Germany or ex-Yugoslavia in order to go for a holiday as a family. These glimpses of my childhood, which I experienced and appreciate dearly, are vividly encoded in my memory and they will stay there forever.

At school we were learning the richness of the communist system and its history rooted in the Soviet Union. Our teachers 'interviewed' us every September to elicit which political party my parents were involved in. Writers and journalists were constantly threatened with censorship. Famous singers, artists, musicians and actors had arduous tasks of performing in a way not to jeopardise the political system. During those years, many people preferred to emigrate to the Western European countries or to America in order to freely continue their careers. Hardly anybody travelled into former Czechoslovakia. Only great powers and bourgeois of well-developed communist countries made trips in to Eastern blocks in order to pursue political hegemony.

Several years after the communist upheaval in 1989 and the Czech-Slovak split in 1993, the Czech Republic transformed from a 'transit' to a 'goal' country for many migrants and refugees mostly from Eastern European countries, Asia and Africa. The Iron Curtain in my country was drawn and freedom of movement and freedom of

speech was partially unchained. Yet anxiety and fear was ‘hovering’ in the air, even though the ‘cage’ in which we were locked up was opened. In a flash of excitement and desire to explore new places, tourism in and out of the country developed.

Without a shadow of a doubt, I never thought, as a child, that my life could be different and somewhat easier. In retrospect, it was routine to queue for food; normal to learn nothing but Russian language at school; exciting to become a good Young Pioneer (equivalent to ‘Scouts’) to “solemnly swear eternal fidelity and honour to my country and its nation”; exciting to receive a ‘real’ pair of jeans for my special tenth birthday; expected to live in a school environment where Roma kids sit alone at the back of the classroom, often treated as lazy, illiterate and backward pupils.

Without speculation I discerned that Czechoslovakians *de facto* lived in ceaseless fear. The political system was unconsciously embodied in my parents’ generation who passed it to my own.

“Only through a rupture with the past would the mental *tabula rasa* be created onto which the Communists would then write their scientifically derived formulae for a good social life” (Stewart 1997a: 87)

Naturally we did what the system required, and we did it thoroughly. It would be a lie to represent all these lived moments pessimistically. The fear and anxiety burgeoning from the political system did not form racism and xenophobia to the degree found today in the Czech and Slovak Republics. Economic and social insecurity and fear of racial discrimination accompanied by evolved stereotypes and prejudices have now escalated. The question: “*Where can we seek our social justice and dignity?*” had oscillated around the thoughts of many people. Migration as the only solution had slowly developed after the Czech-Slovak split, and vigorously increased from 1996 onwards. I have been intrigued with the history of migration and the fundamental processes of crossing social and cultural boundaries, which guided my research project.

2 Research Interest

My research interest in ethnic identities and a sense of belonging has developed in particular through my experience of working (in different NGOs) with asylum seekers and minority groups. The significant area for this study is also rooted in my personal reasons related to my family experiences, which draw me to explore both asylum and migration policy.

The subject of my field study was a group of Roma¹ asylum seekers from the former Czechoslovakia, living in the Northeast of England. Commonly, these asylum seekers migrating to the United Kingdom claim asylum due to political reasons: human rights violations, racism, xenophobia, discrimination and injustice experienced in their home country. The irony is the evidence of racial attacks, and even more unreported discriminatory assaults experienced by many Roma asylum seekers in the United Kingdom. My research study endeavours to cross-check these contradictions - flying from a perilous country to a country riddled with racism. Reconciling the idea of migration and the migration *per se* in my research study, thus, became rather problematic.

The conceptualisation of Roma asylum seekers from the perspective of an outsider transformed my original aims of this project. Initially I intended to examine the social and cultural integration of Roma asylum seekers, and their perception of their own identity and ethnicity from many angles: mixed marriage, gender relations, linguistic adaptation, similarities and differences between Roma and Indian communities, and social relations with other minorities or with British Gypsies. This consequently seemed senseless and impossible. Hence, I narrowed down a huge set of

¹ *Rom* (singular form; *Roma* – plural form) is an ethnic group known as Gypsies. “Gypsies developed a battery of communal devices to protect themselves, summed up in the term *Romanes* – a term which refers both to Romani, the Gypsy language and to ‘the Gypsy way of doing things’ (Stewart 1997a:89). They have been categorised “Zigeuners” in Germany, “Cigáni” in Hungary, “Tsigani” in Romania, and “Gitanos” in Spain etc. In the Czech and Slovak Republics they are called “Cigáni”. This term is today, in some countries (i.e. Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia, etc.) viewed as pejorative; instead the term *Roma* is used. Hence, when referring to this ethnic group in my writings I talk about **Roma**. When I refer to authors who studied Roma, I preserve the original terms they use (For example Stewart [1997b] uses Gypsy; Okely [1980] uses British Travellers or Gypsies, Davidová [1998] favours Roma etc.). The language is *Romanes* or *Roma(ni)* language. It is often omitted that Roma come from Romania (Eastern Europe) however their historical origin is rooted outside Europe, in Asia: “Gypsy migration...moving westwards from India, occurred in several ways, probably at the beginning of the 9th century” (Liégeois 1986:33).

→ study

complex research questions by examining the identity(ies) formation and transformations experienced by the Roma asylum seekers through the processes of migration and socio-cultural adaptation in a new environment.

The crucial point was to identify the relevant anthropological sub-disciplines. I was looking at identity formation from two standpoints: anthropology of migration and economic anthropology. My attempts were to reveal the patterns of migration and the voucher system² for refugees – whether these had impacted in a “labelling” capacity on Czech Roma asylum seekers’ identities. I was concerned whether “refugee-ness” itself can become an identity, imposed by the force of circumstances. I wished to look at the research problem via conducting a comparative study of two different ethnic groups of asylum seekers in England; nevertheless the lack of time and limited resources thwarted this fairly challenging intention.

This research project can be studied in the context of various disciplines: for instance political, historical, economical, sociological, and psychological. I am looking at the research problem from the insights of socio-cultural anthropology, which allows me to disclose lived realities and expose the experience of Czech-Slovak Roma asylum seekers often distorted and misinterpreted by the external political and media-oriented perspectives. I believe that “the experience of living in a highly diverse society can generate an intense interest in the process of cultural formation” (Bottomley 1992:5) and in the process of identity formation.

This research project was conducted during fourteen and a half months of fieldwork. Bourdieu’s (1997) concept of the *habitus* describes “an endless capacity to engender products – thoughts, perceptions, expressions, [and] actions” (Ibid: 95).

“The concept of the *habitus* is defined as a system of dispositions. It expresses first the *result of an organising action*; it also designates a *way of being*, a habitual state (especially of the body), and a *predisposition, tendency, propensity, or inclination*” (Ibid: 214 note 1).

² It is a beneficial system invented by the British government for asylum seekers who are awaiting Home Office decision on their asylum claim. I broadly discuss and devote details to the voucher scheme in Chapter III.

In this research project I have endeavoured to understand and describe Roma asylum seekers' *habitus* in the Northeast of England. I was interested in the ways the changed circumstances, expectations and / or aspirations can transform their *habitus*.

2.1 Hypocritical Hypothesis and the Complexity of the Research Project

My hypotheses of the studied subject were far too idealistic and hypocritical. I went to the field with a tendency to generalise and answer the questions ad hoc rather than to find them. To my horror I realised that I became the creator of stereotypes influenced by the media. I had eminent guidance from my internal and external supervisors and other academic advisors, and I started to look at the research problems the other way round. I observed and traced why and what motivates my informants to do things differently (including the illegal activities) that makes them special. I was attentive to the recounted stories and narratives of their experiences, and I often confronted them with my own experiences of being a stranger in the UK, however with an entirely different status – 'postgraduate student'.

During my field study, I faced three major problems. One of them was the actual 'hunting out' of my informants. The second problem became the instability and insecurity of my informants' stay in England (in particular the Northeast). The '*When I will be forced to leave this country?*' question encoded in the asylum seekers' *habitus* was asked daily. Deportations of my informants became a turning point in my fieldwork. The upcoming war in Iraq in spring 2003, and the involvement of the United Kingdom in such a senseless and excruciating resolution for peace and equality, as well as the upcoming membership of the Czech Republic and Slovakia into the European Union increased the rate of deportations of asylum seekers immensely. The third major turning point of my research study was the scrapping of the original type of vouchers that had been remodelled three times since the voucher scheme was legalised in April 2000. These complex realities brought many difficulties, limitations, and new insights to my research, which accompanied me for the duration my fieldwork. This thesis is divided into two major parts. The first discusses the meaning of migration and the crossing of territorial, social and cultural borders. The second explores the anthropology of economy and the sense of crossing so called economic borders, as well as the creation of social and economic networks. Both parts examine the labelling capacity of asylum seekers and refugees in the United Kingdom.

3 Structure of the Thesis

Following this introductory chapter that outlines my topic and method, the second chapter '*Migration: a sense of belonging in a Rite of passage*' attempts to disclose the patterns of migration and refugee status. In it I discuss the sense of self-identification and belonging expressed throughout my informants' experiences. In this regard, I am particularly interested in how dispersed people organise experience and create meanings. I acknowledge power relations and state control over the movement of people living in the Diaspora, which culminates around a bundle of stereotypes and prejudices. I recognise the consciousness and unconsciousness of fitting people into various 'boxes of identity' according to their colour, race, religion and social status. More precisely, I realise the increasing pressure from 'outsiders' who ascribe connotations and implications to one culture in their own words. Under such pressures the 'inside' individuals are pushed to self-identify and self-fit into these boxes. The greatest challenge of this chapter is tracing the creation of new 'boxes of identity(ies)'.

The third chapter '*Economics: multiple roles of vouchers*' discusses the voucher system, first introduced in the United Kingdom in April 2000, which functions to protect the British economy from the increasing number of migrants. Vouchers are used to cover asylum seekers' basic living needs while they await a Home Office decision on their asylum claim. All of my respondents (who entered the country after April 2000) belonged to the voucher scheme. In this chapter I contrast three types of vouchers: vouchers, cash vouchers and voucher plastic cards, which followed one after the other within two years. My discussion is centred on the connotations imputed to vouchers by 'outsiders'. *Ex post facto* as a participant observer I am disclosing the meanings and understanding of vouchers from the perspectives of the asylum seekers themselves. I attempt to disclose the flourishing realisation of one culture, one group, creation and reflection of identities through doing participant observation. The roots of this research project, my informants, methodology used and the ethical issues are explored in this chapter.

This project is enriched by my own reflexivity and various roles I was attributed: a student, researcher, friend, and stepdaughter. This reflection, particularly when talking about migration and travel journeys, is rooted in my three major journeys to England.

First in 1996, when I came to work in England when I was sixteen, second journey in 2000 in order to gain academic experience and knowledge in anthropology as an exchange student, and a final journey in 2001, to gain a postgraduate degree at the University of Durham.

4 Roots of My Fieldwork

It happened one week in early February 2001, before my departure from Stockton-on-Tees, a small city in the Northeast of England. I was registered for my Masters course in anthropology at the University of Western Bohemia in the Czech Republic, and whilst in England I was experiencing what it was like to be an Erasmus exchange student at Stockton Campus (today Queen Campus) of the University of Durham. I was a twenty-two year old student, eager to develop my knowledge in anthropology, and eager to explore my understanding of human rights and minority issues through my existing involvement in non-governmental and non-profit sector work as a volunteer.

That week I was waiting for a 102 bus to Norton (North part of Stockton-on-Tees), and I noticed a young couple in front of the bus stop speaking a familiar language...I had a very interesting and relaxed conversation with this Czech Roma couple from Tabor (a city nearby my town in the region of Southern Bohemia) who came to England as asylum seekers. When my Erasmus status expired my time to return back to the Czech Republic was awaiting. Having been in England six months 'non-stop' – mainly in Stockton – and having a taste of celebrating an 'English' Christmas, one part of me was very anxious to return home. Notwithstanding, the university, its resources, the course and modules I was attending, and finally the fieldwork opportunities impressed the other part of me greatly.

The purely accidental meeting with the Czech Roma couple in front of the bus stop in Stockton urged me to take my study abroad one step further. I was also very much supported by my university lecturers, especially by the one who then became my supervisor for my MA course. I slowly collected ideas, and further developed a research project. In retrospect this first plan was a very broad, difficult and unrealistic research proposal for my masters' course. My research questions were immense and the directions they took were countless. I took a 'heavy backpack' from the Czech Republic

full of various, incomplete and often idealistic ideas for my research that became lighter as I went along, but at the same time richer in its quality. My research proposal was indeed very ambitious. I echo my external consultant (who offered advice on economic anthropology particularly relevant to chapter three) James Carrier, that “this research project is challenging but very complex. It *de facto* covers two projects – studying two subjects – Roma people and asylum seekers”. I followed James and my supervisor Tamara Kohn’s advice: simplifying by dropping some ideas and arguments, and dealing with issues one at a time rather than all in a bundle. A more realistic research proposal with more realistic research questions was developed during the first two terms of the course. It was a fieldwork-based study that I wished to conduct. Not that I did not have that opportunity of conducting an in-depth field study in my home country, but the chances to study Czech and Slovakian Roma asylum seekers as a **subject**, the anthropology of migration and economic anthropology as **sub-disciplines** and the Northeast of England (Newcastle, Gateshead, Middlesbrough, and Teesside areas) as its **location** was virtually impossible at my home university – The University of West Bohemia in Pilsen - in the Czech Republic.

4.1. A New Place

I started my MA course by research in anthropology at Durham University the first week in October 2001. I was supported by the Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport for the first term of my course. My actual fieldwork lasted fourteen and a half months. I made short trips to the Czech Republic during that time. During these breaks, I attempted to contact repatriated Roma families, even though it was not my initial research interest. My efforts were not rewarded as I expected. I simply could not find any of the deported families; hence after a couple of unsuccessful endeavours I abandoned the idea of including some of the interviews with Roma repatriates. I also concluded that this would be far too complicated for such a research project. Rather, I focused only on the asylum seekers currently in the UK, and left aside thoughts of a comparative study at this stage. My fieldwork began in late October 2001 and it finished in late January 2003. The cultural and ethnic group of people I was studying were Roma, and the social group were asylum seekers from the former Czechoslovakia. My research started with my enrolment on the MA programme, however my interest in the issues raised in the project has a longer history.

Throughout the research I drew on my previous fieldwork experience among the refugees in the Czech Republic, which I gained during my BA thesis at the University of Western Bohemia in Pilsen (apropos in retrospect far from qualitative research) and my involvement in minority, Roma and human rights issues as an NGO youth worker. I was awarded with a NATO Fellowship to help support my fieldwork.

I am not reluctant to suggest that any of my informants comprehend the sense of my fieldwork, much less the discipline I study. The fact that I was paying tuition fees myself, in their words, “*exorbitant fees³ for throwing yourself into such hellishly difficult work, without any money in return whilst you’re here*” (Vit, January 2002) was a central enigma for them. I often became a sitting target during our interviews, and my informants used to compare their lives and commodities with mine - the asylum and student lives. I later abandoned my attempts of explanations that my obsessive desires to do what I do will surely be rewarded at the end. Nonetheless they discussed and interpreted my arguments in their own terms, and I fully understand. In their view I was a student, maybe a crazy poor student, who was ‘losing’ time and money for gaining academic merit. But at the same time they were aware, to some extent, of the benefits of my academic background: “*She knows perfect English; she can write a book about you that you won’t be able to read and she knows a lot of our history*” (a conversation between Eva and her son, October 2001).

During my fieldwork I was introduced to other refugees (Roma and non-Roma) from countries other than the Czech Republic or Slovakia. I met Iraqi, Indian, African, Russian, and ex-Yugoslavian asylum seekers. I was a participant observer at several cultural events (for example Roma festival, Multicultural evening during Refugee Week, Anti-racist movements, and events held by the Red Cross) for refugees and asylum seekers with whom I developed a rapport and contacts. I also attended meetings with Roma asylum seekers and local authorities at the Civic Centre in Newcastle and local non-governmental organisations. At these occasions, I met Czech and Slovakian interpreters whose experiences were priceless.

³ The Czech word ‘*nekřesťanské peníze*’ translates into English as ‘unchristian money’.

4.2. Preparing for the Fieldwork: First attempts, Failures and Frustrations

Before I conducted my fieldwork per se, I received guidance in acquiring certain knowledge and understanding of how to collect various types of data (using different types of research methods) within my course modules and supervision. Every start of fieldwork is complex, and mine was no exception. Regardless, I did not envisage difficulties in accessing data. To the best of my knowledge, there has not been any academic study written or even anthropological research conducted in this particular subject, location and discipline. There is, of course, a vast collection of anthropological study devoted to the topics of migration, economics, worldwide dispersion of refugees and asylum seekers, and Romany Studies. There is also a collection of statistical material related to the Czech and Slovakian asylum seekers, which is used for governmental and political measures to regulate and restrict immigration, and endless newspaper articles (for illustration see the appendices and bibliography). These resources significantly contributed to my research study, even though I could not directly refer to any anthropologist or academic scholar with experience and knowledge of this specific field and target group – Czech-Slovakian Roma asylum seekers in the United Kingdom.

Yet I was somewhat assured that I would not be starting from scratch since I had already visited the location. And after all, I had contact with that young couple in Stockton, did I not? My idealism was stronger than the reality. The Czech Roma couple were no longer in Stockton, and there was no other respondent elsewhere in the Northeast that I knew of initially. In spite of the fact that only seven months had passed since I last visited the area in February 2001, I learned that even during a couple of weeks, circumstances and consequences for these people might change enormously.

“Yet, fortunately, each time I panic for fear the well is running dry, rich new lodes appear” (Foster 1979:177)

Consequently I chose to search for my informants through local institutions and other in-country sources. I started to contact local authorities, Refugee Councils and Traveller Education Services in the Northeast. I was mostly pleased with their support and assistance. I received both positive, but also negative replies:

"You came at the wrong time. There were hundreds of families (or there were several Roma asylum seekers) but almost all 'went back' (or they are gone)." (Traveller Education Service /TES/ in Middlesbrough, Teesside, Sunderland; Refugee Council /RC/ in Newcastle; October 2001).

The positive side was that these institutions led me to new Roma asylum seekers through existing institutions. But the other side of the story was my increasing anxiety that after completing the formal procedures to meet the informants face-to-face they would, *de facto*, no longer be in the country. This was not very far from the truth. For example, before my formal letter of interest to meet Roma families (written in both Czech and English) managed to arrive to the Refugee Council in Sunderland, the Home Office decision had been made. The lady from this institution who became a mediator for our meetings told me that the Roma families in Sunderland were already deported back to their 'home' country. The institutions strictly pointed out that the deportations were unpredictable, which basically created a helpless atmosphere, giving me very little hope for my research, at that stage. My hope, however, did not sink into the depths of frustrations.

I had certain knowledge of how to collect data in my fieldwork but I had no possibility to put it into practice yet. I had a feeling of being in a straightjacket. My frustration reflected my failure to define a core group of informants early on. "My goal was to locate as many migrants as possible, as quickly as I could, so I might get on with the real fieldwork. It took me about a year to slowly develop a social network which included nearly all of the migrants" (Kemper 1979:191). Another failure was underestimating the difficulties that may, and indeed do, occur in such research.

Eventually, TES and RC provided me with contacts to four families in three different areas - Middlesbrough, Gateshead and Newcastle. The first interviews took place in Middlesbrough at the end of October and the beginning of November 2001. I was introduced to one of these families by Lewis, a TES worker, who later left me in their house. Eva, a woman with two teenage sons came to the United Kingdom two and half months before I met her. That day her sons invited me to meet another Czech Roma family just a few blocks from her house. I let myself go to a completely strange and unfamiliar place accompanied by two young men. This type of unexpected and often risky situation followed me for the rest of my fieldwork. For instance, a Roma man

from Gateshead picked me up at the train station one time and took me to his house to meet the rest of his family. On our way we stopped at two places where he had to 'drop' something off to someone. This led me to wait in the car for twenty minutes, overwhelmed with frightening thoughts about what would or could follow. But instead I was greatly rewarded not only with more contacts beneficial for my research, but also more friendships that I developed with the people from my country.

One day, I received a phone call from Lewis which left me in tears and emotionally drained. Eva's family was deported back to the Czech Republic without a chance to say 'Good-bye' to anyone apart from the Czech Roma family from her neighbourhood. She was only allowed to take what she had brought from home, literally what she had reported to the immigration office at the airport during her interview for asylum. It was ultimately in the power of the state to withhold or grant her asylum... That interview with Eva in October was the last I did in Middlesbrough, as well as the last time I saw Eva. I had no success in finding her in the Czech Republic during my break from my fieldwork. Eva's case of deportation was not the only one. It happened to many of my informants. The constant and sudden deportations of my informants became a threatening element of my fieldwork that followed me for the fourteen months of my research. In the following section I introduce my core group of informants under their pseudonyms, and the area they lived in.

5 My Informants and My Roles in Turmoil

"Each anthropologist must contend with the problem of multiple identities that conflict with his or her research role" (Chrisman 1976: 145).

I was able to identify the best way to affiliate with Czech Roma families, and to penetrate into the network of former Czechoslovakian Roma asylum seekers in the Northeast more closely, after meeting a family from Newcastle who was granted asylum. I have to admit that this family's status was no longer 'asylum' but had been converted to 'refugee' status in 2001⁴. I interviewed twenty-six Czech Roma and three Slovakian Roma asylum seekers in total. I met approximately one hundred and fifty Czech and Slovakian Roma asylum seekers during various cultural events I participated

⁴ I explain these terms in regards to asylum and refugee policy in Chapter II

in. Nine out of the total number of my interviewees formed a core group where the process of building trust and rapport was maintained and constructed through discourse and regular visits.

After months of timidity I spoke to a woman playing folk music on her accordion in the Market Place in Durham. Her music sounded familiar and her physical features were similar to Czech-Slovak Roma asylum seekers. I do not want to sound superstitious, but something told me I should get to know her more than as just an audience to her accordion playing. This very interesting woman is a Roma asylum seeker from Romania, who is married to a Czech Roma asylum seeker, as I learned from our discussion long after my fieldwork completion.

Even though my work was geared towards the immediate goal of completing my thesis and my degree with a “commitment to the role of an academic-oriented researcher, I did not drop to a [pure] ‘Hello – Goodbye’ type of research” (Fahim 1979: 264). I was deeply grateful for the friendliness, hospitality and kindness of most informants. It would be unwise to dismiss the fact that the ‘outsider – insider’ relations were affected by various roles my informants attributed to me according to my different status – an academic - in Great Britain. As LeCompte and Preissle (1993) suggest:

“Ethnographers almost always study groups whose cultures are not identical with their own, boundary-spanning skills are critical to the success of a research project” (Ibid: 103 cited in Coffey 1999:73).

Some informants attributed to me the role of a pure student, social worker, NGO worker, or a spy-oriented researcher. In this respect, I often found it complex to position myself into their community.

These patchy feelings disturbed me only during my first meetings with people. The more I came to know them and vice versa, the more strongly the process of trust and openness had developed. Fahim’s (1979) experience that “friendly and hospitable though they [informants] were, they were nonetheless relatively formal and gently reserved” (Ibid: 262) corresponded to my own experiences. My informants had shifted from being formal and restrained to more relaxed. The ‘distinctive’ boundary was crossed. For example, I felt the change of their attitude through their speech. Their

original cautiousness about what they said and in particular how they said it later turned to relatively free styles using jargon, swear words and sometimes vulgarisms.

The boundary was slowly narrowing and disappearing. I developed a close relationship with a core group of my informants, and an even deeper link with one Roma family after the loss of my father. Their caring attitude and solicitude towards me expanded their family ties... I became their daughter and they became my stepparents in England. My roles and positions during my fieldwork were in flux. These roles enabled me to find and learn new things.

5.1. Confidentiality at Work

I have been confronted by the need to preserve the anonymity of my informants and those who contributed. Fahim (1979) notes that anthropologists often conceal the true name of their research site under a pseudonym. I changed my informants' real names. Perhaps, anyone very familiar with the area in Newcastle would have no difficulty in identifying his or her real name because of some individuals' activism and involvement in asylum and refugee issues at the university, during the events at local NGO's and other institutions. I have taken great care to conceal the identity of individuals in order not to jeopardise their 'asylum' life, and to also avoid the "horror to discover that almost everyone who read the material could recognize the individuals" (Harrell-Bond 1976:119).

I had in mind that the "likelihood of obtaining honest answers to personal questions is also enhanced when one can guarantee the confidentiality of the answers" (Pierce-Colfer 1976: 35). To the best of my knowledge, I was highly committed to maintaining the confidentiality of the data gained, and I avoided betraying my informants' confidence in any way. I was constantly aware and sensitive to my informants' needs and rights, as well as being fully conscious that something is almost never given for nothing. The problems that concerned the people I was studying turned out to concern and interest myself.

I feel it is important to introduce my core group of informants under their pseudonyms for better orientation of the reader in the quotes and some paragraphs in the following chapters. The details of their 'asylum' life and deportations, which I am

familiar with, are stated in brackets: Mariana (stepmother) and Honza (stepfather), Vit (Honza's brother) and Dana (Vit's wife). These two couples were granted asylum. Olek (Honza's second brother. His wife was deported in early February 2003. Olek chose voluntary repatriation in March 2003). Berta and Jirka (good friends of my stepfamily. Still awaiting Home Office decision on their asylum claim). Filip and Hana (a young married couple and their son Simon who was born in England), Klara (a woman married [in the Czech Republic] to a Jamaican refugee man) and her daughter Pavla (Family apparently left their Council House and moved to another place. Last interview in March 2002). Eva (a young woman with two teenage sons. Family was deported in March 2002). Ages of my informants, as well as the names of various places I visited, and the area where my fieldwork was conducted are unchanged in my text. I adapted my research in a way to protect private and secret information.

6 Methodology

6.1. Doing Participant Observation: Through the Eyes of an Observer versus Participant

“Every social situation can be identified by three primary elements: a place, actors, and activities. In doing participant observation you will locate yourself in some place, you will watch actors of one sort or another and become involved with them; you will observe and participate in activities”
(Spradley 1980: 39)

I believe that participant observation and ethnographic interview are the most important methods of data gathering. It is a very effective source of detailed social scientific information. The methodological approach of data gathering for this research project was quite complex. I juggled with various research techniques to discover the best method to use in my fieldwork. In principle, I “kept important techniques in mind and adapted them to the situation at hand” (Spradley & McCurdy 1980).

~~Tape~~ or ~~video~~ recording of interviews was entirely excluded. Taking photographs during the interviews in the informants' homes was also a taboo, and only my stepfamily did not object: "*Don't photograph them* [Their friends from the neighbourhood who were visiting them], *they don't have asylum yet. Take a picture of us if you like*" (February 2002). Interestingly, during the cultural events for asylum seekers and refugees in which local authorities were involved, the fight in front of my big camera was vivid. The distinctive attitude in the private sphere and the openness in public contributed to my participant observations. Children, mothers with babies and kids were chasing the lens of my camera, wanting me to take as many pictures as possible, and later to make a copy for them. I felt a distance of **a few** Roma asylum seekers who built a protective fence around themselves, whilst visiting them in their homes, in their privacy. During the public events this fence fell apart and we were able to bridge the gap between trust and fear.

"Every ethnographer must learn to take the role of other people, to look at life through their eyes, to share their experiences. This means a partial detachment from one's own perspective on life, but not a detachment from those whose culture is being studied" (Spradley & McCurdy 1980: 33-34).

My research was certainly enriched by the encounters with some of my 'key' informants. Our informal discussions were vital to develop my understanding of their situations and their culture as well. Many of the research questions could not be addressed adequately by anything except participant observation. A high degree of transparency was achieved through this research method.

"The difference between fieldwork and field experience is field notes" (Bernard 1994:191)

Collected narratives, case studies, and interviews were recorded only into my diary. I made notes from what I remembered or considered important and interesting that sometimes created 'messiness' in my findings. I might have omitted some important parts that I did not consider vital at the time I took the interview, although I attempted to follow Foster's research habits:

“All forms of behaviour, all data, have meaning, and that they are relevant to interpretation and explanation, even if this relevance is not apparent at the time they are noted or recorded...[I try] to record as many data as possible on everything that occurs to me. When I become aware of data ‘out there’, I want them, even if I have no plan for their immediate use, and even knowing that some of what I record will never reveal (to me) their real significance” (Foster 1979:171).

I created small notes and scribbles. Some statements I managed to register fully. Each evening after returning from the field I set down and exhaustively typed my notes and codes from a diary onto my laptop, to avoid forgetting the day’s jottings that were still fresh. The same went for my observations, impressions and feelings.

One ordinary afternoon during my interview I was sitting, having a conversation and taking notes into my diary as usual. Suddenly Vit made a subtly shocking remark (presumably meant as a joke). “*Jana, you are so funny with your little book. You writer! You are like a spy*” (Vit, April 2002). I often felt uncomfortable scribbling down notes during deep conversations. I was aware that taking notes might be intrusive and discourage my informants from giving me more information. Therefore I trained my memory to remember basic facts that were recorded straightaway when I was ‘out of the field’. I was building up my ability to remember things I saw, details I was told, which is evidently “crucial to successful participant observation research” (Bernard 1994).

7 Language Competence: A Common Language in an Uncommon Place

“The moment you begin writing down what you see and hear, you automatically encode things in language. This may seem a rather straightforward matter, but the language

used in fieldnotes has numerous long-range consequences for your research” (Spradley 1980:64).

Speaking the same language as the people the anthropologist or ethnographer is studying is generally known as a vantage point. My informants and I were pleased to share our conversation in our own native language – Czech. Primarily, I found it very convenient and very useful for my research. The fact is that my English competence sometimes turned out to be a problem rather than a vantage point. I was confronted with situations where I was asked to interpret, assist or negotiate because of my language credibility. I discuss this problem in the latter part of this chapter in the section ethics.

My own language competence might possibly influence the data I collected, in particular with regards the translation of the interview and meanings from Czech into English language. Phrases or statements such as: “*To peklo, které v Čechách začalo nás dobralo až sem do Anglie*” translated as: “*It was the beginning of hell that eventually brought us here to England*” would in a literal translation be: “*This hell, which in Czech started us got over here to England*” or: “*Mluvíme sprostě...*” is translated in the text as “*We are swearing...*” which word by word would sound like: “*We are talking rude words...*”. Or a Czech colloquialism: “*Houby*”, an expression that the person is entirely wrong, would be translated from the Czech sentence, “*Ale houby, co si myslíš, že se tě někdo bude ptát?*” into English: “*But mushrooms, what do you think, that somebody will ask you?*” This would not make much sense with a literal translation into English. In this thesis I offer my translation and add the original Czech version in brackets. The interviews are indicated in the text in italics. I had to double check some puzzling statements and found clues to the cultural meanings interpreted through their speech. I tried to translate the meanings of my findings, of the shifting and performative nature of identity, as I understood it. It is not a self-absorbed encounter of my own experience, but rather an attempt of passing the recognition and reflexivity of my findings into a form appropriate and understandable to other readers.

I was especially careful to make sense of the cultural patterns and behaviours I observed juxtaposed to my informants’ narratives. More simply, I was interested in the facts that were offered to me as ‘true’, but which were given to me in contradictory ways. They were often-changed and mixed-up statements. I also did not want to misinterpret my perception of their speech that differed from their actions since

“Language and speech is based on the more general contrast between competences and performance” (Spradley & McCurdy 1980: 40). For instance, Eva told me that her husband is not interested in coming to England because of their unhappy marriage. This however, clashed with what Lewis (the ETC worker) told me, that also differs to what another Czech Roma asylum seeker living in her neighbourhood claimed. The interpretation of her husband’s ‘absence’ in England was: disconsolate marriage, husband’s death or husband’s second marriage to another wife in France. The question, that I had never had a chance to ask because of Eva’s deportation, is whether these three variations were created by Eva or by other people?

Another example is the *Gádže*⁵-Roma relation. I echo Okely (1978), “Gypsy beliefs should not be seen independently of the wider society; mainly because they create and express symbolic boundaries between the minority and the majority” (Ibid: 78 cited in Donnan and Wilson 2001: 22). It happened after my third visit to my stepfamily in Newcastle. Mariana, Honza and Vit were very open to reflect on their experienced racism and discrimination in both the Czech Republic and the United Kingdom. They gave me new insights into stereotypes and prejudices against *Gádže* created by Roma. I was not surprised by their original perception created after my first phone call, as they reflected: “*You - a White Gádže came all the way here to England to write a book about us – Blacks...*” (Mariana, April 2002). I did not mind my position being the only *Gádže* in a community, and I did not find it peculiar. Mariana told me:

“I have nothing against Whites if they don’t use us for their benefit, and don’t make me feel like I am in a ZOO. From the first time we met you, we knew that you are different and that you are a good honest person with a true face who likes us” (Mariana, April 2002).

I was happy to learn that I would not be a subject to be stereotyped along with other *Gádže*. The same day at the same place Mariana offered me a snack, and Vit made a slightly shocking comment. He pointed out that I might feel distaste [from the Czech word ‘*štitit se*’] to eat something which is made by Roma hands. Mariana interrupted him saying: “*You should not say this now*”. Their warm reception and sudden bitterness

⁵ *Gádže* (English *Gadje*) is a term that Roma people often use when referring to non-Roma / White people. In this work I use the Czech *Gádže*.

relating to *Gádže* (perhaps encoded in their perceptions) was a puzzle that left me with ambiguous feelings.

7.1. Roma Language

I strongly acknowledged Czech Roma asylum seekers' capabilities to learn throughout my fieldwork. I was impressed by their speed of penetrating into the local system with little or no knowledge of the local language. My amazement reflected my belief that I initially knew almost nothing about the 'culture' of asylum seekers and/or Roma culture. I neglected the fact that this group – Roma - is bilingual from early childhood. Roma parents talk to their children in both Romanese and Czech language. Here in England, children of Roma asylum seekers as well as parents direct their effort into learning English. Their endeavours became weaker once they realise that the easiest communication was with the assistance of an interpreter.

I immersed myself in the surroundings in order to gather more data. My attempts to learn the Roma language were in my hands. My stepmother agreed to facilitate. Notwithstanding, I found it difficult that her teaching and my learning finished before we even got started. So, I therefore made notes purely in the Czech language. There were moments I felt 'out of place and like a stranger' when my informants were talking in Romanese to make me (either consciously or unconsciously) illiterate and to cut me off from engaging and contributing to a discussion. When I interfered by repeating a few words I had caught, asking for their meanings, I was not given a clear answer. Sometimes my interruptions were followed by laughter or jokes: "*If you really want to know - We are swearing*" (Unknown visitor in my stepfamily's home). So they told me these words, but on the same day I had already forgotten the Romanese version. I could only guess from their expressions and body language what the dialogue was possibly about.

Yet, the question flying through my mind is '*Does the credibility of my data depend on a common language?*'

8 Interview

There are many types of interviews with many purposes, and every individual is involved in interviewing to various degrees, either as interviewer, interviewee, or both. The investigator's concern is often the validity of data that the respondents describe. My uncertainty about the information that was given to me had arisen when I asked the same questions in the same form and the same way in another interview, and got different answers. The formal type of interviews with my informants sooner converted into more informal way. It turned out to be a fundamental source of social interactions, and definitely aided the development of new friendships.

8.1. Interviewing the Interviewer

Throughout my preparations for fieldwork, I formulated a set of questions for the qualitative interviews, and I occasionally used them. My fieldwork interviews were rather informal and unstructured in character, more in the nature of a probing conversation. This let my informants open up and express themselves in their own terms.

Ethnographic interview is a special technique where "one person formulates a series of questions and presents them to another person. It is a procedure by which the anthropologist begins by searching for questions that are meaningful to informants" (Spradley & McCurdy 1980:34). In my field experience, I often became the target of my informants' questions. My interviewees directly exchanged my place to be the interviewers. In some cases I could not even embark on my research questions. Perhaps, out of idle curiosity, my informants gave **me** a set of questions: For example they wondered: *Can I read and write in English? How old am I? Have I got a bank account in England? Do I work here? Do I want to work here? Have I got a car or have I got a boyfriend?* I found it understandable to a certain degree and also interesting. Their questions seemed meaningless, but when I discovered their purposes they became more graspable.

From their perspective some Roma asylum seekers related my status in England to a sort of 'free hands' student who can catch the chances that they legally cannot access. In their view I was a young gifted woman who knew perfect English. I already

had a university degree and was pursuing another one; I had knowledge and experience in working with non-governmental and governmental bodies; I developed contacts with local authorities and institutions; and above all I was single with a bank account. However, from their interpretation, I did not ‘properly’ use all of this in practice. Certainly, as they said, I needed to take my opportunities whilst being in England. I profoundly do not want to misinterpret their willingness to help (in their words: ‘*your tough time*’), but my endeavours to make them understand that my major priorities lay in education exceeded my capacity.

“Why are you losing your time? Why don’t you do anything? If you need work just let me know. If you need a car for your work, I will sort it out for you. Or here my Kurdish friend can give you lifts home”⁶ (One of two interviews with a young man from Beroun and his family in December 2001).

In general my interviews went without any serious complications. Roma asylum seekers seemed happy to be a subject for my study, and I was pleased with their openness to discuss any topic. Still, some themes were not open to be explored, for instance issues related to money and economy that made it a bit hard when collecting data on vouchers.

I did not usually have the feeling of being consciously told lies; however some information did not correspond to the informants’ previous narratives, which I found confusing. I sympathise with their cautiousness, possible anxiety or fear, which led to them giving me sometimes misleading data, especially if I take into account the sensitivity of complex issues they face in everyday situations; or as Fahim says:

“Long-term informants, having experienced a close relationship to the researcher and understanding his interests, may tend to answer him as they perceive that he wishes to be answered. A long-term informant may also conceal facts or twist information so as not to embarrass

⁶ In the middle of my interview a stranger came into the room and for about ten minutes they were bargaining over the price of the second hand car. This reminded me of Gypsy economic niches – horse fairs – described in the literature (Stewart 1997b, Davidová 1998, Okely 1995), however, at this time and place the horse was replaced by a car.

himself or the others. He may not wish to jeopardize his relationship with the researcher” (Fahim 1979: 267).

My **fieldwork** started at the train stations where I was picked up and driven to my respondents’ homes. I did not class myself as the “uninvolved, fly-on-the-wall observer” (Bernard 1994) even though I was not a ‘non-stop’ participant observer in the community. I carried my fieldwork in my head continuously, as I still do today. I spent quality time getting to know the physical and social layout of my field site, and I certainly did “learn participant observation in the field. The strength was me, as a researcher, who became an instrument for both, data collection and analysis through my own experience” (Bernard 1994: 137 - 144). The informal encounters (combined with my experience) contributed to my research journey to make the study more qualitative. I believe that if I had spent more time in the field and less time out of the field, I would have expanded my data findings. I do see one aspect of my fieldwork lacking in that I could not be a full time participant observer. I was not able to record the everyday rhythm and routine in the community. I also could not record how my informants spend their everyday life (playing or preparing children for school, looking for a job, shopping, playing music, watching television, spending free time, arguing etc.). I usually spent a few hours, and sometimes afternoons in my informants’ houses, drinking coffee, talking and collecting data. Only during these interviews I obtained answers to my questions. I believe that I could have collected more qualitative data by living with them rather than being ‘in’ and ‘out’ of the field.

I often wondered whether my informants benefited from my research project. I became consciously sympathetic and more willing to help them whenever possible. I perceived that some Roma asylum seekers understood our rapport as ‘rewarding’ and this could have made their stay in Britain somewhat easier. To me, it was somewhat natural to assist them and not expecting in exchange their continuing cooperation in my research. In this respect much of what I had experienced applies to ethical issues of my research project.

9 Ethics

"My point is that our sense of ethics guides our fieldwork choices and behaviour, no matter what that sense of ethics is" (Rynkiewicz 1976:59).

"Each field situation is unique and presents a multitude of problems for the researcher: theoretical, methodological, and ethical" (Mann 1976: 107). I began my field research in a typical fashion – listening mindfully to, and observing firmly everything that occurred. The only possible way of recording my findings was by note-taking, which was more exhausting and less detailed than tape recording. Confidential information was given to me with the request not to record it into my diary. Yet, I was an anthropologist – participant observer – collecting data for my research, and found this information relevant to the understanding of my studied subject. This became an ethical dilemma. I was under the pressure to divulge information that had been given to me in confidence. On the one hand I wanted my readers to understand the meanings of my informants' behaviours and actions that are most easily comprehended through the 'secret' stories. On the other hand I did not want to jeopardise my rapport with my respondents by disclosing information that might threaten their existence in the UK.

I was open and sincere to my respondents but later I realised that my genuine and frank attitude threatened my own privacy. I recall my father's saying: *"The reward from talking is silver – the reward from silence is gold"*. But how could I – an anthropologist conducting a field study, bombarded with endless and curious questions – possibly be silent? Perhaps I gained both silver and gold but I definitely sometimes said more than I had to. I boycotted proposals for dating some young married audacious Roma men. These proposals came after they realised I was a single woman. Without bias, I was reserved and consciously elusive to such offers. When I invited a friend of mine from India (who studied at the same university) to a Refugee week event in June 2002 and introduced him to the Roma asylum seekers' community, I no longer suffered from proposals for dates.

As an anthropologist, dealing with people, I was subjected to all the complexities, ambiguities, and unpredictability inherent in social interactions. It was seldom possible to "completely control or anticipate the problems that arise in a given

research situation” (Mann 1976: 107). I was guided by strict limits encoded in my head of ‘how far’ I could assist my informants, and I tried to find ways not to go beyond these limits as well as not to be disloyal to my informants. Some situations were hard to confront but with my supervisor and some professors’ support from the university I always managed to treat these complex circumstances sensitively.

The heterogeneity of information on Roma asylum seekers that I obtained from various resources was perplexing in my research. I had the opportunity to look into records of some Roma asylum seekers pupils and their parents stored in TES (Traveller Education Services). I photocopied the history of my informants from the documents for my own use. I found useful data that I paradoxically never applied in my research study or indicated in my thesis. What I read was dissimilar to what I heard from my informants. In this vein I did not want to overstep the limits of ethics and morals, nor did I think it would be fair to my respondents to push aside the fog in order to clarify miscellaneous information.

9.1. Ethical Dilemmas

My language credibility, my university status and my contacts with immigration authorities and refugee institutes were converted into serious ethical dilemmas in my research project.

I evoke my first meeting with Klara in Gateshead. Peter (the Gateshead TES employee) and I took a seat in her front room, and after presenting my research interest and introducing myself, Klara stressed: *“I don’t mind to help you if it helps us to get asylum”* (November 2001). I felt inherent power imbalances to which I was affiliated by my different ‘status’ and aim in this country. My language competence and developed contacts with hierarchies were directly associated with my help and support. Being ‘labelled’ as someone with power evoked mixed and ambiguous feelings; feelings of privilege and desperation. I was perceived to be in the role of a social worker or a lawyer rather than an anthropologist or researcher, which was frustrating because I often lost connotations of where I stand. Different people identified my position differently, and in retrospect there is no reason to wonder why not. In fact I will later reveal this as a vantage point that gives me various insights related to my various attributed identities.

For example, one time during a coincidental phone call that occurred during my interviews, when I heard: "*One minute, I will pass you onto my interpreter*" (Vit, November 2002)⁷. I was asked relatively often to translate letters, medical prescriptions, newspaper articles or public announcements for my informants. Or I was used as a facilitator of informal discussions during public cultural events. I was happy to assist my informants in this way, even though I stressed that I was not a qualified interpreter. I sometimes tried to circumvent such situations in order not to go over the ethical limits that anthropologists, to my knowledge, should not cross. I also did not want to be exploited because of my dispositions and willingness to help my informants. I was frustrated to see that the needed assistance did not come from outside, thus, some of my informants depended purely on me. For illustration, one young Roma asylum seeker frequently phoned me to help with interpretation at the doctor's. She had continuous stomach and intestinal problems for a couple of weeks. Her poor English was not good enough to explain the symptoms to her GP, and the interpretation service was only available in two weeks time. Her pain was increasing and the wait for an appointment with a doctor and interpreter seemed endless. She was forced to contact me, and we went together to see a doctor. I was concerned with the consequences that might occur, but I was interpreting for her as a friend. This young lady with a two-year-old son was sent to the hospital later that day with severe intestinal parasites. The doctor claimed that she had arrived already in very critical condition. She was under medical treatment for one week at the hospital and for four and half weeks at home. Her gratitude was enormous saying: "*You saved my life*".

Today I still ask myself whether it was ethical to comment on a professional interpreter's work during a meeting with state officials at the Civic Centre in Newcastle, where I acted as a pure participant observer. The young interpreter had twisted and misinterpreted Roma asylum seekers' claims and statements, and she even added details that were never told to her. I bit my tongue, wriggling and squirming in my chair, knowing that 'ethically' I had no right to interfere. Immediately after this meeting, I told my informants what my whole picture of the interpretation was.

⁷ I was talking to a head teacher, interpreting Vit's explanation of why his daughter did not go to school for a few days.

I often found myself anxious and afraid of the steps I took in order to avoid risks. Or did I have any other choice? I was thrown to the sea, as many anthropologists and researchers are, and I had to learn to swim. Even though I knew how to swim, the sea sometimes stirred up and I had to manage the strong waves in order not to drown.

9.2. Risking the Benefits

It would be a lie to say that I anticipated the risks as well as the benefits I gained in return. As I look back into my field notes, I recall critical moments that put me into dangerous situations.

One of the major risks I undertook during my fieldwork was the actual meeting with my informants (without the assistance of NGO's, TES or RC). I had to 'hazard' my own safety. The meeting point was at the train station where someone who I knew only from a previous phone call picked me up. I was driven somewhere, to a totally unknown place, to meet the rest of the family and conduct my interview. My attempts to meet first at cafés or in any other public place were worthless. They simply refused: *"We make better coffee at home – Turkish. You don't have space and privacy, and it is expensive too"* (Filip, May 2002). The consequences of such risks I was undertaking never appeared to threaten me.

Another serious experience happened in a school environment. My original purpose was to collect data for my research from the local elementary school attended by Roma children asylum seekers. Peter (TES worker) who accompanied me to the front of the school, for a split second made a remark about Pavla's difficulties. Specifically he divulged the school director's and the TES's suspicions that Pavla (a 13 year-old schoolgirl) was pregnant. From his speech, I was kindly asked to have a 'girls-chat' that would ideally end up with Pavla's agreement to undertake a pregnancy test. Before I even thought about the consequences with such a task, we were standing in the director's office, when suddenly Pavla arrived and the school director and Peter left. 'Yes', we did have a girls' chitchat, and 'yes' Pavla eventually agreed to the test. The next day I was asked for help to assist a Slovakian schoolboy (once he could be found) who had been physically attacked at school and disappeared.

When I presented a paper on my fieldwork project at the Postgraduate Conference in Anthropology at Durham University in May 2002, many interesting reactions and crucial questions from the audience emerged primarily from the lecturers. Their strong concerns about my safety in the field multiplied my own worries, and I promised myself to never 'jump' into a stranger's car again, and never undertake other's responsibilities for which I am not qualified. All that had happened was also later discussed and confronted during an anthropological seminar series for postgraduate students at Durham University. The ethical issues of my fieldwork arose, and supportive measures were made through the Durham University Ethical Committee and the anthropological department in order to protect my own safety and security whilst conducting my fieldwork study. I was instructed how to confront these situation for the future.

I used to talk spontaneously about my family with my stepmother and stepfather in Newcastle. When it was clear that my mother would come to visit me, Mariana and Honza made plans. From the initial trip to Loch Ness in Scotland we agreed to meet at their home in Newcastle. I was a bit afraid of such a visit for two reasons. Firstly, I was afraid of betraying my real mum, since she had no idea that I had 'found' Mariana and that we had created a 'daughter-mother' relationship. Secondly, I had all the materials and data in my diary, and I was afraid that new information would make my field research endless. Eventually, my mother and I went to visit my stepfamily, and I was able to smoothly apply my observations and new data into this thesis.

9.3. My Mother and My Stepmother

After a few months of living and settling into Durham, I decided to invite my mother to the Northeast to give her a taste of life in a country she knows only from television programmes. It was during the Easter season in 2003 when my mother and I flew over to England. Having had enough of my own experience with travelling to the UK and my mum's worries of passing the British border controls, I was happy to be with my mother on this journey. She speaks no English, so in this case my mother avoided being interviewed by the British immigration officers with the help of an interpreter.

It was an ordinary busy day at Ruzyně airport in Prague. The usual British immigration office was closed that day⁸ so we only had the one interview at Stansted airport in London. Whenever I pass the British passport control to be permitted to enter the country, I feel like a 'black sheep' amongst a flock of white innocent sheep. This moment is a moment when I must separate from the majority of passengers, and follow the arrows to get to the right entrance gate with the label 'NON UK RESIDENCE/ NON EU'. In spite of the fact that I have passed this gate several times already, this momentum always evokes a sense of being a 'NON'. This time crossing the border accompanied by my mother was no exception. We were ready to go to 'our' gate for 'our' interview (a type of quantitative questionnaire survey). My mother made an egregious remark that reminded me of Dover eight years ago when I first came to England as an au-pair girl. "*How strange. A Black immigration officer - interviewing a Black woman...*" Yes, it was indeed strange for my mother, as it was for most Roma asylum seekers. Having said that, it was somewhat exotic for me when I first came to England as a teenager in my teens. But at that time it was rather my curiosity to see other nationalities and people of different colours in reality - face to face (mainly because at that time my country had just woken up from the political upheaval. Tourism or other sorts of population movements were not developed like today; therefore it was a privilege to see and to talk to 'foreigners'). I was no longer surprised by the fact that immigration officers were not necessarily 'White' but I became more interested in how this country dealt with discrimination and racism eight years on, when I came back to England in order to pursue my degree in anthropology.

Although she was visiting me during my final stage of writing up this thesis, her short stay enriched my research project from the ethical point of view considerably, particularly when my mother and I were visiting my stepfamily in Newcastle. One afternoon my mother and I met Honza at the Newcastle train station and he drove us to his place. It was the first and only time when nobody else from the community was visiting my stepfamily. Traditionally, the coffee was served and Roma music played in the background. The Czech cooking products that my mother and I brought from home (dumplings mixture in a packet, baking soda, pudding and vanilla sugar) were placed on a table. Our discussion, at the beginning was very formal and reserved. This vividly recalled my first interviews when I felt the invisible border between the informants and

⁸ British immigration officers at the Ruzyně airport in Prague interview all passengers travelling to the UK. Details of the British immigration procedure is in Chapter II.

myself. I felt embarrassed in front of my mother, especially having in mind our conversation beforehand. I assured my mum that this family was warm, benign and very open-minded. Her worries were even stronger because of the fact that she had never visited a Roma family in her life. However, my mother entered the house without anxiety and concern but on her face I saw the total opposite. The communication barrier was gingerly crossed when my mother and my stepmother started to talk about cooking and business. Side by side, they spontaneously brainstormed the possibilities to 'import' Czech cuisine to the United Kingdom. I felt an entire outsider. Moreover, I felt frustrated with my mum's idealism and impracticality. Suddenly my mum took her chair, and sat next to Mariana. Later they set aside the table completely and chatted in the corner of the room. Honza and I were discussing NGO 'businesses but one of my ears was sharply directed to the corner. After three hours my mum and I left with two porcelain dolls from my stepmother who gave this gift to provide memories as well as an exchange for the cooking ingredients we had brought from the Czech Republic. Mariana said:

"This is for your mum. It is for her to remember us and also for the things that you brought for us" (April 2003).

When I recall this visit I am struck afresh by the speculation: *Was it a good idea to invite my mother to my stepmother's house?* On our way back to Durham, my mother disclosed her feelings. I was happy to hear that although there were moments of disagreement, my mother did not spell them out during the conversation. *"Even though Mariana is a very nice person and we had a very nice chat, I somehow was not able to tell her my real opinions to avoid arguments"*. Today I reflect that as an anthropologist I failed to elicit all the dismissed ethical issues of such a fruitful meeting.

10. Feeling Homesick

When I completed my fieldwork and began writing up, I still found some time to visit my informants – friends in the Northeast. I followed the deportations and new arrivals of the Roma asylum seekers. When I was sometimes too busy with writing up, I had less time to make the trip to see my stepfamily. I missed the horrible taste of the non-filtered coffee (called 'Turkish Coffee' in the Czech Republic) served in a small glass that left my mouth full of coffee grains. I missed the fake flowers hanging on the walls, the kitsch pictures, the tabernacle placed on the cupboard and the overall special

taste of decorations in the house accompanied by the music of Vera Bila (a Czech Roma singer). Needless to say, I missed my stepfamily's company, their sense of humour and their stories dearly.

My homesickness and interest to know more led to further regular visits to my stepfamily even though my fieldwork was completed. I was a bit worried that such visits would influence the final stage of my research project – writing up the collected findings. New information they shared with me fruitfully enriched my knowledge about the life of Roma asylum seekers. There was always something new to me. In every visit I observed their behaviours and body language. I listened to their old and new stories, and was always learning things and facts that would be interesting and important to add to this final document. I was pleased to realise that I am an anthropologist interested in the subject and discipline despite being 'out of the field'. I no longer collected data for my research project. I came to 'store' material which did not 'fit' into my thesis, into a file for my further writings and publications.

10.1. Learning to Learn

'Your imagination will suggest a lot of other nooks and crannies of our culture that you can explore as a thoroughly untutored novice' (Bernard 1994:150)

Central to my research project is, as Coffey aptly suggests,

"The recognition that fieldwork is personal, emotional and identity *work*. The construction and production of self and identity occurs both during and after fieldwork. In writing, remembering and representing our fieldwork experiences we are involved in processes of self presentation and identity construction" (1999:1).

This research is a fruitful contemplation, originating in a search for dignity and social justice, an understanding of 'others' and understanding of self rather than a pure compilation of data generated towards a final thesis. It is a research full of passion and emotions that emerge throughout the narration of stories. It was not possible to 'detach' from these feelings, nor do I think I would be a good anthropologist to do so.

During my fieldwork I learned to acknowledge the complexity of a culture, a social group and individuals and their values. In this vein I learned about the ‘others’ – people I was looking at – as well as about myself. Sensing a meaning of things and their values was inherently identified in my own reflexivity. I was experiencing culture(s) and identity(ies) rather than writing about culture and identity. Simultaneously my experience and reflexivity of the fieldwork turned out to be a vehicle of my own identity and sense of belonging formation. I was “intellectualising the experience on what I learned about how to learn, on what it is like being a novice, and how best [I] can take advantage of the learner’s role” (Bernard 1994: 150). I benefited from my research vastly. I learned about Roma, myself and about the *Gádže-Roma* relations accompanied by stereotypes and prejudices.

I studied from written materials, recounted stories, life histories and lived realities. I learned how much I still need and want to learn in this field. “I thought I knew all there was to know on the subject; in reality, I knew almost nothing” (Foster 1979: 177). The ability to realise how much knowledge I wish to attain in this field, and my willingness to improve in my research skills underpinned my research project. The knowledge and experience gained throughout this research is embedded, and it is equipped to offer something not only to readers who will find this piece of work in a library or in a series of short articles, but also to the people this work is about.

“People under study must have access to the researcher’s writings. It is true that people’s desire to know what is written about them may vary but it seems only moral on the part of anthropologists to make their findings available to the studied people especially if they plan to subject them to a longitudinal research” (Fahim 1979: 263).

I was *participating* in my respondents’ private and public activities; *observing* what was going on, what they ‘said’ they do and what they actually ‘do’. I, in Bernard’s words (1994) “maximized my chances for making valid statements”. I was a participant observer who “aimed to discover the hidden meanings that lie behind behaviour” (Spradley & McCurdy 1980: 30). I – an anthropologist doing participant observation, endeavoured to “construct ethnographic maps, not merely of the geography in which

people live, but also of their social relationships, economic activities, religious beliefs and every other area of culture” (Spradley and McCurdy 1980: 32).

I took the same route to get to England as my informants, but I had certainly crossed different borders. In the next chapter I divulge these borders and discuss their meanings in my informants’ own words.

CHAPTER II.

Migration: a Sense of Belonging in a Rite of passage



<http://www.promway.com> and www.gypsy caravan.us/index2.htm



<http://www.classicphotos.com/wagons/bb.html>





"God created the earth for people to go to and fro, not to stay in one place"

Olwig F. K. (1997)

"We came from one fear to another" (Klara, November 2001)

1. Going Through the Channel

It was a mild winter even though at this time of year in the Czech Republic you would normally need a fur coat to keep yourself warm. Christmas time was over and I was at the Prague central bus station lining up in a queue. There were mainly young people, students and au pairs I guess, waiting for a coach from Prague to London Victoria in January 2002. After eighteen hours of journey, our coach drove into the shuttle from Calais to Dover. There, we were asked to take all our belongings from the coach and go through the X-ray and passport control that involves a 'short' but often personal interview in Dover. Some immigration officers were assisting those who had no experience yet of filling in the Boarding pass. Later, I noticed that a Czech interpreter was talking to a middle-aged man who was holding a plastic bag in one hand, and in the other he was holding on to a girl's arm. I had passed the 'test' and left the hall...

The door of our coach closed and we were about to drive towards London. Through the window I saw this man from our coach. He was sitting on a kerb hopelessly staring forward, and holding the girl in his arms.... Our coach driver did not seem surprised leaving two passengers at the border, as he commented: *"This is a never-ending magic circle...they are out of luck!"*⁹ We had two and a half hours of travel to reach our destination – London. This man and the girl were forced to wait for more than half a day for the coach returning from London to take them out of the British island to Prague. Their trip took them nearly twenty hours, and ended up at the same point as where it had started, without having the privilege of seeing their 'imagined world' in reality after crossing so many physical borders.

⁹ Neither the driver nor I really knew a simple reason why those two people of darker skin were not allowed to continue their initial journey. The immigration officers did not stamp their passport 'Leave to enter for/until' unlike us. Since 2002 the British Immigration Passport control was temporarily set up at the Prague Ruzyně airport to 'pre-interview' any passenger travelling to the United Kingdom. The successful passenger would obtain a stamped boarding pass, and the second interview followed for the non-British and non-EU citizens at the airport in the United Kingdom.

In this chapter, I investigate the sense of belonging – “a catalogue from which people can draw selective aspects, elements, and characteristics of Identity” (Preis 1997:97), and the formation of identity or identities of the Czech and Slovakian Roma asylum seekers in the United Kingdom. I am interested in the ways they organise experience and create meanings. Meanings, that are not ruled by the ‘outsiders’, but instead negotiated and reformed by Roma asylum seekers in the Diaspora. During my fieldwork, I saw many scars that have become the legacy of these people from their experience of being asylum seekers: people who were significantly tempted by their ‘imaginary’ land. People that are distinguished “not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined” (Anderson 1999:6) – according to their physical, cultural and social traits. A community that was ushered into the migratory process in order to find a way out from a storm of social and cultural exclusion in the microclimate of crisis in the Czech and Slovak Republics. Their journeys, paradoxically, brought them to another storm in the United Kingdom.

I am concerned with refugees’ experiences gained throughout their journey from a place ‘X’ to a place ‘Y’ which is their temporary home. I am interested in studying the processes of crossing borders and claiming territory that involves a process of transition from one place to another; from a more anticipated and foreseen past to a new unpredicted future; the process of marginality and adaptation.

In order to give insights into the *rite of passage* of Roma asylum seekers in the United Kingdom, who are trapped in the notions of state power relations, I start with the question: *Who are my informants; and how do they think about themselves?*

2. Refugee, Asylum Seeker or Rom: Is it not all about Human Beings?

Migration, generally, provides a rich account of a variety of terms and labels (i.e. migrant, refugee, asylum seeker, illegal, legal, forced, economic, and political). These are clearly defined and readily available in brochures, manuals, scripts and periodicals (for example of the UNHCR, United Nations, and Refugee Councils). For instance

when I question, “**Who is a refugee?**” I find a relevant legal definition from the 1951 International Convention, which defines refugees as:

‘A person who is outside his/her country of nationality or habitual residence; has a well-founded fear of persecution because of his/her race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion; and is unable or unwilling to avail himself/herself of the protection of that country, or to return there, for fear of persecution’¹⁰
(United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 1951 cited in UNHCR 2003)

But what does such a definition mean in the daily life of a refugee? What sorts of patterns and labels are hiding behind these theoretical definitions in the idiosyncratic life of a refugee? I refer to Cohen (1994):

“Refugees are neither immigrants nor illegal migrants, although, like immigrants, they have forsaken their homelands for new countries and, like illegal migrants, they may enter those new countries without permission. But a refugee is, in the end, unlike either. Both the immigrant and the illegal migrant are drawn to a country. The refugee is not drawn but driven; he seeks not to better his life but to rebuild it, to gain some part of what he has lost. The immigrant and the migrant are propelled by hope; for the refugee whatever hope there may be must arise from the ruins of tragedy. The refugee, unlike other migrants, has lost or been denied a basic human need – the legal and political protection of a government. Accompanying that loss has been the loss, as well, of culture, community, employment, and shelter – all the elements that contribute to a sense of self-worth. Refugees, whatever their origins, are in need of protection” (Ibid: 168).

¹⁰ The UN Convention was drafted with the needs of the post-war displaced people of Europe in mind. The modified 1967 Protocol sought to take account of events elsewhere in the world and was signed by nearly 100 countries (Cohen 1994).

A historical development of perplexing terms and definitions makes my study rather problematic. I was struggled to find the right definition when referring to my group of informants in my work, and I often questioned myself: Are these Roma migrants, having voluntarily flown from their home country because of continuous threat and injustice seeking respect and dignity in the UK, asylum seekers? Or are they refugees?

“An economic migrant normally leaves a country voluntarily to seek a better life. Should he or she elect to return home, they would continue to receive the protection of their government. Refugees flee because of the threat of persecution and cannot return safely to their home in the circumstances then prevailing” (UNHCR 2003).

The majority of my informants came to the United Kingdom voluntarily for political reasons to seek respect and humanity. They migrated because they experienced the threat of persecution, humiliation and violence. Most of them, in their words, simply wanted to “find another chance of life”. Paradoxically, they went through the asylum procedure and became objects of an asylum policy. According to the legal definition, my informants then represent a triangle: an economic migrant with a refugee at its base, and the asylum seeker at the top of the triangle.

I came to the conclusion that I will no longer ‘fight’ with this puzzling vacuum of terms and labels *per se*. Roma migrants in England are legally categorised as asylum seekers, in the media press they appear as both: asylum seekers and refugees, whilst they sometimes position themselves as refugees, at other times as asylum seekers, Cigán or Czechs. I use more generally the expression ‘asylum seeker’ “to refer to those who request, but who have not yet obtained, Convention refugee, or a similar status” (Cohen 1994:73).

These terms carry deeper meanings for my informants than just a simple definition. I rather focus on their perceptions and comprehensions of being someone different because of their different social status. Some people I interviewed called themselves ‘political migrants’ or ‘refugees’, whereas others attributed themselves a

status of 'political asylum seekers'. Or in some cases they classified their ethnic or national identity as that of Roma, Cigán or Czech.

3. Why Identities? The Ways to Identify Ourselves

We should, furthermore, distinguish the words '**identity**' and '**identification**', their meanings and interpretations *par excellence*. If a Czech Roma identifies with a Czech identity it does not necessarily mean that his identity is Czech. This also applies when a Roma identifies himself with a Roma identity. Alternatively, if a Czech Roma in the United Kingdom is identified as an asylum seeker it also does not mean that his perception and self-identification is equal to the 'refugee' identity encoded in other peoples' perceptions, and vice versa.

To make this point richer and more explicit, glimpses from two interviews with Eva in Middlesbrough provide evidence of the variety of contradictory 'identifications of identity'.

*"I am Czech. I don't feel like Cigán. I came two months ago. Yes, I do miss home but I want to stay here. My boys like it here but they had some trouble at school. Children here do not like **Roma**, I guess. [Her boys were racially attacked at a local school in October 2001] (Late October 2001)*

*"I came to England to claim asylum because my family was discriminated against and humiliated by Czechs because **we are Cigáni**. We came here because **Czechs beat us Cigáni up** back home. There is racism; you know that **we Roma** are treated very badly there! Did you know that here they say "Gypsy"? ...If you ask who I am, I say **I am Czech**. I was born there. But here, **I am an asylum seeker**.... My boys were verbally abused at schools.... Children shouted at them "you black refugee". But we are not black. We are brown! I think we will always be different than the others because we want to stay in a place that is not ours. It does not matter what we are called. What is the difference, anyway?" (Early November 2001)*

Or Vit's remark after a conversation with two policemen at the parking lot in Durham:

"I don't know if this is something that we Cigáni do but I don't. I hardly listen to someone who tries to look cleverer than me and tells me what I should do – I never do...so" and a sudden remark, *"We're happy you are interested in us Roma"* (Conversation with Vit after the police officers claimed a fee for unpaid extra hours of parking, December 2002)

Perhaps the circumstances compelled Eva to identify herself and her sons with a variety of identities was in order to 'integrate', or maybe she sensitively accommodated to what I – as an outsider with no experience of refugee livelihood – may like to hear. Conceivably Eva circumvented more recent facts of racist attacks and injustice towards Czech Roma asylum seekers. She denies her ethnic identity when talking about 'verbal abuse at British schools', admitting that racism is visible in England too. Eva may possibly feel frustrated by the a priori unimagined facts of inhumanity towards refugees and asylum seekers in the United Kingdom. Whatever reasons were given in Eva's and Vit's narratives, the sense of identity(ies) is ambiguous.

Eva's statements might sound a bit vague, and the question – *"Who is she, really?"* may possibly appear. But this question applies to all of us – *"Who are we, really, and where do we belong?"* I propose two answers, where the first one is by far the simplest – we are all human beings, and even though we are somehow rooted in a specific place, in essence we belong to anywhere we wish to. Nevertheless, if we acknowledge state pressure and control over the movement of people, I must say that this answer has a touch of naivety. Each individual is so complex that it is hard to define what his identity really is and where he really belongs. Therefore I would rather offer a second answer – a human being does not have one simple identity but a set of identities, and at any given moment, under the notion of rules and roles, ^{he} places ^{her} himself somewhere – into some imaginary box. Eva's case is no exception. Our conversation provides many interesting and crucial thoughts which are fruitful for understanding perceptions of herself, her ethnic identity – brown Cigán, her national identity – Czech citizen born in the Czech Republic, and her social identity – asylum seeker.

Circumstantial / multiple id. situation

Self-identity is often portrayed as a desire to fit into box A or B, and to contribute to being part of those boxes – to 'belong' somewhere. Eva attributed herself

certain social and ethnic statuses according to circumstances and situations. The reason for this may perhaps be to avoid given stereotypes and prejudices towards Roma or refugee groups. Similarly to other people, Eva fits herself into various boxes. Notwithstanding, I must point out that Eva, as well as other Roma asylum seekers, are often fitted into boxes by others who tend to attribute them identity and ethnicity. There is evidence for this in terms of the role of the media, and its significant influence over public opinion. For example newspaper articles with the headlines: "*Asylum seekers: 9 out of 10 conmen*", "*...illegal asylum seekers*", "*Losing the war on asylum crime*", "*Britain the No.1 refugee magnet*" create myths about asylum seekers. Those myths are portrayed as facts, and the public opinion is easily influenced not in favour of asylum seekers but the opposite¹¹.

Migration profoundly relies on claiming a 'safe' territory and the asylum seeker tunnels out of various barriers. This does not always necessarily signify that he or she is eager to belong, and later assimilate into either box 'A' or 'B', but they might possibly create a completely new box. Box 'C', in this case, would form a new group of people with a new identity.

4. Return Ticket and Ticket 'Leave to Remain'

There are countless 'travel stories' similar to the one that I had the opportunity to observe in Dover. There are even more stories – stories of deportations of asylum seekers. Roma asylum seekers from the Czech and Slovak Republics travel to the United Kingdom usually with a return ticket, but ideally, their initial intention, or maybe aspiration, is to be granted '*refugee status*' or alternatively to obtain a ticket '*Leave to Remain*'¹² "that is granted at the discretion of the Home Office [as] a means of extending some sort of sanctuary to refugees who are refused Convention status" (Harding 2000:45). Apart from my stepfamily, or those few who are still awaiting a

¹¹ Comments and reactions by the Refugee Council Press on articles from The Sun (2002), Daily Star (2002), Daily Express (2002), Daily Star (2002). See appendix III.

¹² Exceptional Leave to Remain (ELR) is granted to people who are not recognised as refugees, but who qualify for asylum for other reasons, such as risk of being tortured if returned to their country of origin. The government imposed controls on travel documents issued to people with ELR in the UK. From 27th March 2003 people granted ELR can apply for a '*Certificate of Identity*' document to enable them to travel to any country but that of their origin, just as '*Refugee passport*' (Refugee Council, February 27, 2003)

Home Office decision on their asylum claim, all the other asylum seekers I have met were deported back to the Czech or Slovak Republics¹³.

Roma embarked on journeys to the United Kingdom with a concrete intention - to be granted refugee status. Such a journey is not just an event, "not just a happening in the world: it is a *relation* between a certain happening and a given symbolic system. Meaning is realised...only as event of speech and action. *Event is the empirical form of system*" (Sahlins quoted in Malkki 1997:87)

Nonetheless after fourteen months of fieldwork, most Roma asylum seekers' original goal was converted into an adventurous trip, what I would call a severe 'stop over' in their lives.

4.1. Where Does Migration Start?

"Migration is a process of reworking old labels and creating new ones for trying out new identities promoted by the refugee experience (Camino 1999: xv). I perceive migration as a never-ending story. It is inherently a continuous process, neither a temporary phase nor seasonal. Migration has its roots in the word 'migrate', which is defined as:

"A move[ment] of people from one place of abode to another, especially to a different country; 'of an animal, especially a bird or fish' [that] change its area of habitation with the seasons; or as a move under natural forces" (The Concise Oxford Dictionary 1998).

Migration is not a new 'thing', nonetheless some Roma informants never thought about their origin and Roma migration journeys from faraway India before experiencing their own migratory movement to the United Kingdom. As a result of their contemporary travel experience and stay in the multicultural United Kingdom, some of them came to be gradually conscious and interested in Romany cultural patterns and Roma history.

¹³ Annual UK asylum statistics see Appendix IV.

"I didn't know that Indiáni¹⁴ counts like we Roma. I remember when I first met Indiáni I thought that they are Cigáni too. I talked in Czech and then in Romanese because they didn't understand. They didn't understand either language so I tried my broken English.... Did you ever know that we came from India? That's why Pakistani and Indiáni look like we do" (Filip, November 2001).

Migration always existed but in the past migrants' journeys took relatively longer. Horses or wheel caravans used to be one of the major means of transport, whilst today comfortable express trains or fast airplanes together with the development of new technology and communication have speeded up the migration process enormously.

"Today's transnational migrants also have at least the possibility of frequent and easy movement from country to country as a result of cheaper and more efficient transport. Migratory lives now frequently span countries and even continents, so that the border is not something to be crossed once and for all, but something to be crossed and re-crossed in the imagination if not always in reality" (Donnan and Wilson 2001:106).

The migration process derives from external forces and it involves creation, exploration and experimentation of new and changed identities under old labels. It also unites members of a refugee group in their migration project together. In the following chapter I disclose the existing economical network between Roma asylum seekers and other immigrants that "works within cultural categories, which are continually redefined, to produce meaning" (Gardner 1995: 147). A chain of assembled stories mirrors the meanings and understandings of external forces in my informants' own words.

I echo Anderson (1996) suggesting, "More and more people are, like the 'wandering Jew', carrying their identity around with them". Many Roma asylum seekers during their travel journeys seek the place – place to belong.

¹⁴ Czech word for *Indiáni* is related to American Indians. *Ind* is equivalent to Indian group from India. My informants always tend to say *Indiáni*; instead of *Ind*. Singular form for *Indiáni* is *Indián*. In Chapter III. I discuss in depth the social and economic relations between *Indiáni* and Roma.

“Geographical boundaries and peoples perceptions of where they belong is increasingly complex; indeed, some may enter a state of permanent exile, where nowhere is truly home” (Gardner 1995:5).

Gypsy culture is a striking example of some of the difficulties that arise when a territorially based concept of culture is employed. Gypsy/Roma travel journeys and settlements have a long history, and there are many hypotheses and speculations about large-scale migrations from India or Egypt. Some writers (i.e. Fraser 1995, Liégeois 1986, Davidová 1998, Stewart 1997, Okely ~~1980~~) argue that there was a first major migration around the twelfth century. Another hypothesis is that:

“Gypsy migration, part of that ceaseless drift of nomadic tribes moving westwards from India, occurred in several waves, probably at the beginning of the ninth century. From this somewhat ‘central point’ Gypsies spread throughout Asia, and they appeared in Europe between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries” (Liégeois 1986: 33).

According to Growe (1995) “the Second World War brought many Roma to the concentration camps. Between 1942 – 1943 around 7, 900 Gypsies were sent to the camps at Léty in the South of Bohemia and from there to Auschwitz. In 1944 about 21,000 out of 23,000 Gypsies inmates had perished in Birkenau’s gas chambers”(Ibid: 6). Liégeois (1986) claims that:

“Since the Second World War Gypsy travels were becoming mere journey, and exchanges, especially economic, with the surrounding environment at the many stop-overs were fast disappearing. The industrialization of all Western lands had plugged the holes through which nomads passed and overhauled their opportunities for economic adaptation”(Ibid: 56).

According to Powell (1997) “in the 1950’s Roma were to be prohibited from travelling and from owning wagons and horse” (Ibid: 93). “Since the 1960’s a forced Romany integration and assimilation emerged coupled with a new scheme of sterilization designed to reduce Gypsy birth” (Willy G. 1975).

My stepmother recalls her time in a hospital in Ústí nad Labem in the Northwest of the Czech Republic.

“God was standing next to me. I was in a hospital because of my women’s problems twelve years ago; I would have been sterilized [English translation for a slang expression ‘podvázat’] if I were not quirky. My doctor wanted to do the operation. He told me that I won’t be able to have children ever again and he suggests doing the operation. I said ‘no’ and wanted his confirmation in writing. I still have the document. And look, after two years later I had my last son.” (Stepmother, October 2002) ¹⁵

Gunter Grass¹⁶ attempts to answer the question: *Why are Gypsies the lowest of the low?*

“Because they are different. Because they steal, are restless, roam, have the Evil Eye and that stunning beauty that makes us ugly to ourselves. Because their mere existence puts our values in question. Because they are all very well in operas and operettas, but in reality...they are anti-social, odd and don’t fit in. “Torch them!” shout the skinheads”.

¹⁵ Such cases are still investigated by experts. For instance, the New York Times reported that Slovakia’s Interior Ministry has announced that it will send a special team of investigators headed by a woman, to look into claims of Gypsy women in Eastern Slovakia who have been sterilized against their will. It was reported by the two NGOs that at least 110 Gypsy women had been sterilized without their consent since the fall of communism in 1989. (Green P. in New York Times, March 6, 2003)

¹⁶ Quote from „Losses“ by G. Grass in Stewart (1997b:1)

4.2. “Gypsies are the Least Protected Citizens” (Václav Havel 1982 cited in Powell 1997)

The velvet revolution in Czechoslovakia in 1989 brought the collapse of the communist regime. Václav Havel took over the presidential post and democratically proclaimed:

“Rights and freedoms should benefit all people regardless of their nationality or ethnic origins. Belonging to a certain nationality or race cannot be a reason for limiting a persons rights or depriving him of his rights” (Charter 77: Havel 1982 cited in Powell 1997:91).

Yet the democratic principals that offered Czech and Roma people the opportunity to form their own political and cultural organizations also created a new atmosphere for open and virulent expressions of prejudice toward the Rom.

“Communism was in one way much better. I can simply explain why. Even though everyone was controlled by the regime and freedom of speech was prohibited, we were not so humiliated and discriminated against by Czechs. Nobody would shout at us - Roma – ‘You black mouth’ or you wouldn’t see signs like ‘Gypsies back to the gas chambers’; restaurant signs: ‘We don’t serve Gypsies or ‘Gypsies not allowed’. We were not scared to walk alone on the streets and we went partying and clubbing. Now, you cannot see any Rom in a public disco because he is scared. After ‘89 the fear of putting anyone in jail because he said something against the regime was gone. Democracy was a great deal but it didn’t last for long. It turned the other way round – against Roma interests. There was freedom of speech and we Roma were for the first time formally and legally recognised as different, with different cultural traditions and heritage other than Czechs. (Honza, April 2002).

Davidová (1998) followed the history of Roma after the Second World War in 1945 and the post –war migration of Slovakian Roma to industrial regions and to larger

cities in the Czech lands. She explores the communist upheaval in Czechoslovakia and the development of democracy in early 90's.

“After the elections in 1990 Roma became more active and many Roma associations developed. *ROI – ‘Rómská občanská iniciativa’* (Roma Civil Initiatives) was established for all citizens without any national, religious or other beliefs who claim to protect Roma rights. The year 1990 was, for our Roma, the year of ‘ethnic-national renaissance’. They entered their own route. For the first time in a Roma history, in 1991 the ethnic independence of Roma people was equal to other ethnic minorities, and they were identified as a nation” (Ibid: 223)¹⁷.

Anderson (1999) regards nation, as well as nationalism, as a cultural artefact of a particular kind. Nation is “imagined as a community, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship” (Ibid: 7).

“Nation is an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet, in the minds of each lives the image of their communion. To understand nations properly we need to consider carefully how they have come into historical being” (Ibid: 43-44).

For most Roma, what is *imagined* not a community *per se* but rather a dream or a creation of an imaginary world without borders to be crossed in regards to acquiring equality and justice. As we shall see, my informants (and I believe not only my informants, but almost every individual) imagine places in different ways, according to who they are and where they are. During the period of democracy formation in the former Czechoslovakia, as well as in the Roma exodus to the United Kingdom, Roma

¹⁷ Translated from the Czech original (Davidová 1998)

community ties are in some respect vivid. I suggest that from the aspect of Roma migration, a process of recreating their community is involved.

“Together with democracy new political parties were founded. ...But also other political parties were formed. Democracy evoked a sort of free space for activists. It was also an opportunity for those who think that we Roma have nothing to do here...those who support ethnic cleansings - fascists and narcissists... Roma stopped trusting Gádže and later also other Roma. It was the beginning of a hell that eventually brought us here to England. Here, we also formed a community of Czech and Slovak Roma and we fight together” (Honza, April 2002).

4.3. The Storm in the Communist Czechoslovakia and Thunder in the Democratic Czech-Slovak Republics.

I try to be accurate to offer evidence of the harsh social and political situation that prevailed after the communist upheaval in Czechoslovakia, in order to give a clearer picture of the climate of ‘crisis’ after the Czech-Slovak split in 1993.

The Bureau of Democracy and the European Roma Rights Centre reported that after the collapse of communism the atmosphere of cultural clashes between Roma and non-Roma increased sharply, especially after the Czechoslovak split in 1993. The 1993 Citizenship Law, created at the time of the Czech-Slovak split, determined that Czechoslovaks of Slovak nationality (settled in the Czech lands) were able to opt for Czech citizenship¹⁸. Nonetheless, Slovaks had to present proof of a clean record for the previous five years and residency in what is now the Czech Republic for two years. The Czech Bureau of Democracy Press Release reflected on some cases after the Czechoslovak split:

“Roma suffer disproportionately from poverty, unemployment and interethnic violence. They are subject to

¹⁸ The Act of Citizenship came under criticism immediately after its enactment in 1993 for preventing Roma with effective ties to the Czech Republic – such as long periods of stay, work, and family – from claiming Czech citizenship. Czechoslovaks of Slovak nationalities were able to opt for Czech citizenship. The law was designed to ‘intentionally’ move Roma from the Czech Republic to Slovakia. It created a new group of non-citizens of the Czech Republic who, in spite of being settled in the country as former citizens, lost many of their rights, for example rights to vote or to be elected (www.humanrights.cz and ERRRC 1999).

deeply ingrained popular prejudice, as is repeatedly affirmed by public opinion polls. There are numerous incidents of violence or intimidation directed against Roma. Interethnic violence is usually perpetrated by skinheads and there are a number of racially motivated crimes. Roma are the most likely victims of such crimes, and the number of incidents continued to rise.

In practice Roma face discrimination in such areas as education, job opportunities, and housing. Some restaurants, pubs, and other venues throughout the country routinely refused service to Roma and post signs prohibiting their entry. In some cases, local authorities intervene to have such signs removed. In July 1996 a district in the North of Bohemia found the local deputy mayor guilty of incitement to national/racial hatred for closing the municipal swimming pool to Romany children because of the sweeping hepatitis epidemic. In 1993 the Government created a framework in education to prepare disadvantaged youths for their first year in school through a number of year-long programmes (so called zero grades). Many districts with high concentrations of Roma participate in the programme, which is funded solely by local authorities. About half of existing 'zero grades' are organized by special schools for the mentally disabled and socially maladjusted; the pupils in these classes frequently proceed directly into the special school curriculum and are thus never given the opportunity to attend mainstream schools" (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labour; January 1998).

It would be a lie to say that I vividly remember the political atmosphere when the 'Iron Curtain' was solidly drawn to protect the Socialist power. There are glimpses of my memories, when I was around twelve, after the political upheaval in 1989. I will never forget the moment of watching the evening news with my parents when my father suddenly jumped out of his chair shouting: "*Switch off the lights in the whole house, now*"! This was a 'public opinion poll'. Yes, indeed, we – the citizens of

Czechoslovakia had the right to vote without light switches on whether we agreed or disagreed with the Czech-Slovak split.

“Do you remember the switching on and off of lights? Such a comedy! They [the existing government] had already decided and they made only fools of us. Two states had one government. Both states wanted separation but Slovaks more I think. Democracy after communism! We were quite naïve and stupid! But we still helped each other” (Honza, May 2002).

5. Making a Decision: Push out from the Czech and Slovak Republics and Pull into the United Kingdom

Claude Cahn (1999) reported that the terms ‘discrimination’ and ‘racism’ became a wider subject for justification in the first extensive migration waves of Roma leaving the Czech Republic and Slovakia and seeking asylum in Great Britain and Canada in 1997. A significant influence that contributed to the Roma exodus came from the side of the media. Romany asylum seekers had avidly consumed a television programme highlighting favourable living conditions for Roma in Canada. A private television station broadcast a programme on Roma applying for refugee status in Canada and England, portraying the countries as offering a ‘warm welcome’ to migrants. The broadcast spurred hundreds of Roma to sell their possessions in order to buy airline tickets. By October over 1,200 Roma had applied for refugee status in Canada, and dozens of other Czech Romany families in the United Kingdom¹⁹.

“The white cliffs of Dover have traditionally been a welcome sight for travellers, a symbol of arrival in the United Kingdom. In 1997, Dover became the focus of massive media attention surrounding the arrival of the first Romany asylum seekers from the Czech and Slovak Republics; subsequent arrivals have also been covered extensively” (Petrova, Cahn, and Kiuranov 1999)²⁰. After such reports Roma took their chances and

¹⁹ Claude Cahn (1999) clarifies that the number of asylum seekers had skyrocketed from 148 in 1996, to 1222 in 1997 (see table of contents)

²⁰ In October 1997 over 100 articles appeared during one week, warning the British public of the ‘Gypsy Invasion’ that was about to overrun the country. A Czech commercial TV station broadcast a story of a few Czech Roma families having a ‘wealthy’ life whilst claiming asylum in Great Britain. After TV programme an enormous number of Roma asylum seekers appeared in England. (Petrova, Cahn, and Kiuranov 1999).

mass migrated to the United Kingdom. This mass migration, called the 'Roma exodus' predictably manifested what media does to people.

Many Roma were manipulated and imposed upon by the fundamental patterns of encroaching **push** and **pull factors**. The process of push and pull can be explained in "a global context of migration as a process where migrants do not travel because of rational economic choice, but instead are propelled across the world by the working of the world system" (Gardner 1995: 12). The discriminatory elements and open borders **pushed** many Roma out of the Czech and Slovak republics. Since 1997 and onwards the significant **pulling** factor that brought many Roma to England was the one of media, that increasingly accommodated ideas of 'multiculturalism'. "Media markets transform national and cultural boundaries" (Gillespie 2000:170) and often create 'fictive' stories in a way to effectively and quickly sell them to the consumers. Ironically, Roma asylum seekers entered the UK with no idea and awareness of the invisible patterns of discrimination and racism embodied in the label of a refugee or asylum seeker. During the crucial years of mass migration in 1997 – 1998 (and onwards, before the outbreak of the War in Iraq in March 2003)²¹ multicultural United Kingdom was very well presented in Eastern and Central Europe and the picture of 'a welcoming and safe country' was encoded in the heads of many migrants.

"Ethnic minorities are now often portrayed in deliberate 'multiculturalist' ways through a (superficial) focus on cultural festivals, individual success stories and the cultural exotica of ethnic minority cultures. ...Despite the best intentions of the producers, such 'multiculturalist' representations may actually serve to reinforce culturally sedimented views of ethnic minorities as 'Other' and simultaneously appear to give the lie to ideas of structural disadvantage and continuing inequality" (Cottle 2000:11)

²¹ When the mass demonstrations against the War in Iraq in spring 2003 began, I was 'bombarded' by the frustrating phone calls from my informants to literally explain 'What is going on, and how dangerous is it to be in the UK because of its involvement in the War'. They were afraid of the war consequences, especially in the UK. They were not well informed about the situation in the UK, since their understanding of British news was limited. I became their major 'resource' in this crucial worldwide period.

The family ties (some family members were deported and the rest stayed in the UK) and a natural desire to find a 'better life' in the imagined country greatly contributed to their migration movements. With this picture and a desire to take up the opportunities they had committed themselves to in the migration 'project' they became the active players. Social networks and Roma "relative accesses to them have been vital in determining who does and does not migrate" (Gardner 1995: 45).

5.1. Out at the Margins and Over the Edge

The majority of Roma asylum seekers also became actors in a game of global labour exchange. "Once an area built up links with the UK, migration became normalized; rather than being seen as risky and out-of-the-ordinary, it became the most obvious and desirable option" (Ibid:46).

*"After communism, the private companies developed very fast and those who had some money and contacts started to run businesses. There were hardly any Cigáni having that opportunity. The private and also state companies wanted white people because we are known as lazy. To avoid employing Cigáni was well planned. Companies made a deal with job centres. We were easily **recognised from Gádže** from the computer when we were seeking a job in a job centre. Next to our name was a small sign. Star, C - like Cigáni, or a small cross. Of course, we did not know that. The computer displayed those signs on the screen, which we did not see. Anyway, later this awful trick reached the public, and we Roma count it as another form of racial discrimination" (stepmother, April 2002).*

Some employers in the Czech Republic refused to hire Roma and explicitly asked local labour offices to refrain from sending Romany applicants for advertised positions. The feeling of being under the threat of discrimination and racism was fairly significant and migration as an external force became the only possible solution. Many Roma were '**pulled**' by the image of the 'West' where human rights, in particular Roma rights, are protected. Filip was recalling the documentary about Roma in Dover shown on Czech commercial television.

"A friend of mine saw that programme on TV about a group of Cigáni who came here as asylum seekers. I didn't see it. In Czech nothing has changed

*for us - Roma. To be honest, I didn't have such a case like other Cigáni – beaten up, humiliated and so on. But my family and I came to try for a better secure life.... It was great at first but then, I heard from another Czech friend from here that his son was beaten up by some British in front of a school. I got scared. Life is not bad here but I realised that **it is not easy for us anywhere**" (Filip, November 2001).*

The other **pull** element was emanating from the family dispersal. Roma families usually migrate together, but there are many cases where one member of a family is forced to return back to his or her 'home country' whilst the rest of the family stays in England. Those who were separated from their families attempted to return back to England. This case correlates to one of Honza's sister Petra who all together made three migration journeys to England. Honza recalls her journeys:

"Petra arrived here with her husband not long after my family and I came. It was three years and something ago. One day immigration burst into their house and Pepa [her husband] managed to say good-bye to her only. Petra called me, crying and asking for help...but he was already sitting in a car ready to be deported...After a month or so, he came back to England claiming asylum again. But then she was deported...Exactly the same story. She was there and he was here. They got fed up and decided that this country was not what they'd expected. They were not happy here anyway like at home" (January 2002).

Roma asylum seekers were trapped between their 'imagined world', which became slowly re-valued as the days of their stay in England passed by. At the same time the 'old world' - their home - was reflected and idiosyncratically realised from different perspectives. As we will see later in this chapter, there were many traumatising obstacles that crossed Roma asylum seekers paths while they 'settled' in the UK.

I had the opportunity to meet Petra and her mother in March 2002. At this time, both of them originally came to visit Honza's family in England. It was Petra's third time in England. Her travel story at the immigration office at Heathrow airport is quite remarkable:

"We didn't have to go through immigration in Ruzyně when we were flying. I think my mum and I were the only Cigáni in the queue. When we went through the passport control in London, everything was in order. I had all the documents - invitation from Honza, copy of my balance and money. They sent us to the special office and we were interviewed for two and half hours. The Czech interpreter did not understand quite what was wrong since we came as tourists for one month. Eventually they said that we could stay in the country for three days only. We couldn't believe that! Of course we disagreed. We were saving money to fly over here for months. My mum is a pensioner and I'm without work...and we are allowed to come only for three days"? (Petra, March 2002).

After two and half hours of interview for a tourist visa, Petra and her mother finally decided to claim asylum. The interview for asylum claim lasted no longer than ten minutes. The third week after their arrival to Newcastle the Home Office made a decision on their asylum claim. They were both deported back to the Czech Republic.

5.2. From Hell to Paradise and back to Hell: The Continuous and Endless Border-Crossing

The horrific stories of deportations will never vanish from the minds of migrants. Is it just a loss and a gain that border crossing involves? What does it mean to cross borders, and move from one 'space' to another, which are surrounded by the economic, social, political and cultural borders? I endeavour to answer these questions, but I cannot ignore the fact of the endless border crossing in our everyday lives.

Borders *per se* may serve as either a link or hindrance between those spaces, and the process of border crossing may create opportunities for re-creating what has been lost or forming something completely new. Donnan and Wilson²² point out that borders are used to mark difference, those who cross potentially threaten to undermine and subvert the distinction between 'us' and 'them', and they raise a striking question about what happens if those classed as 'them' seek to become 'us' (2001). Of course there are

²² They write in reference to the movements of undocumented migrant labourers from Mexico to the United States.

cases of decisions and attempts by Roma to integrate to become a part of the majority. I started my interviews between October and November 2001. Interestingly, after several months of my fieldwork at the beginning of 2003, the same Roma informants who were still awaiting asylum no longer perceived England as a country where their ongoing life would be happy. The entered dreamed '*Paradise*' was converted into '*Hell*', and at this time for many Roma the imagined world was no longer United Kingdom but the Czech Republic.

"I remember the first time when I suddenly appeared at the airport. I have never seen so many blacks, Indiáni and other non-whites working in such a prestigious spot. I was really amazed and I loved England straightaway...and also when you walk in a street you meet so many coloured²³ they have jobs, there are black doctors, bus drivers, teachers and so on. You can't see this that often in the Czech Republic. ...But after a while I realised how big England is for ethnic minorities that someone must do that job, so you can see them anywhere. What you cannot see is racism. I think it is hidden that well that you don't even know how widespread it is here. When Cigáni started to be attacked here, I started to be scared for my family and of our future life. There are more things I dislike here than I like. It is so sad to see in what place children grow up here. They drink, take drugs, there is a dirt and mess everywhere on the streets...if I talk with officers, they smile at me but I can see their hate that comes from inside. They sent me from one devil to another²⁴. What place is this? Nothing is comparable to our small gold country (My stepmother in January 2003).

I am aware that the development of close rapport and friendship with my informants requires a 'special' time. Our discussions during the interviews developed together with our relationship. Notwithstanding, I am more aware of the fact that their absorbed experiences in England in most cases impacted on their decision not to integrate or be integrated. Their asylum stay is more like a 'stop-over' than a fully anticipated re-settlement.

²³ English translation for the Czech word '*barevný*'

²⁴ Czech expression for having bad or even worse advice from someone.

Donnan and Wilson describe lives of Mexican migrants in southern California as “revealing how people’s identities and daily existence are transformed and re-valued by having crossed the border and how they come to terms with the changes that result” (2001:110). I have pointed out that Roma experience gained during their ‘stop-over’ in England is rich with self-reflection, and the re-shaping or creating of identities. Conversely, such experiences are acquired not only by having crossed one border – entering a zone (a state territory) that is marked by the political and economic division between two countries - but also by understanding other social and cultural symbolic boundaries. Borders symbolise both - diversities and identities. I am stressing ‘ies’ because, since there is not only one border, nor is there a simple identity. We, every human being, persist in a set of traits and capacities. Carrithers (1992) would call it ‘our sociality’.

“That sociality culminates in the ability to track a complex flow of social action... The abilities were those, which had been most prominent in creating the social and cultural diversity of our species. In other words, I stressed those things we all share which have allowed us to differ so greatly” (Ibid: 177).

6. Construction of Boundaries and Identities

Boundaries are “the lines which demarcate state territory” (Prescott 1987:36 cited in Donnan and Wilson 2001: 45) but they are also significant signs of transition between one cultural, social and political zone and another.

“The symbolic constructions of the boundaries to international border cultures are often extremely significant signs of regional and national identity, but yet are among the most difficult to discern” (Donnan and Wilson 2001: 43).

I discuss the subject of identity formation of the Czech and Slovakian asylum seekers in respect to the process of migration and boundary crossing. The fragile

complex of **humanities** and **identities** give our society a rich diversity. "We are, all of us, quite as effective at production cultural diversity as we are at preserving continuity" (Carrithers 1992:7). Similarly to my previous discussion on 'boxes of identities' and individuals fitting into them, I view the 'border crossing' in similar context. Symbols of borders are understood by various people differently; hence the process of going through one stage to another, from one status to the other differs.

"Boundaries are constructed by people in their interactions with others from whom they wish to distinguish themselves but, unlike the markers of national boundaries, we cannot objectively determine in advance what the distinguishing features of these symbolic boundaries will be, nor exactly where the boundaries will be drawn. Moreover, they mean different things to different individuals, both to those on opposite sides of a boundary as well as to those within it. In fact, boundaries recognised by some may be invisible to others" (A. P. Cohen 1985: 13 cited in Donnan and Wilson 2001: 24)²⁵

Roma refugees' experiences of crossing such borders and passing through different stages, marginalisation, adaptation, deportation and repatriation, are there in their minds, and those experiences involve transition and transformations of value. Furthermore, such experiences lead to the cultural construction of places (homelands that are viewed from different perspectives), and they might play a central role as a common source of identities in their global network of relations. The territorial location for Roma asylum seekers in England is a place that provides a space for constructing a sense of belonging by reflecting their cultural values and it provides a space for maintaining cultural and family ties. A process of migration is a process of creation, and Roma asylum seekers are no exception. Paerregaard (1997) looks at migrants as cultural innovators and designers of new identities. "Individuals move from one group to another group, from one status to another status and during these movements they undergo certain changes" (Ibid: 41). Anderson (1996) distinguishes formation of identities regarding the frontiers:

²⁵ A. P. Cohen is interested in understanding the importance of community in people's experience. His focus is British communities. He is consequently interested in what the boundary means to people, or what meaning they give to it (C.f. 1982, 1985, 1986).

“A non-state boundary may be an enduring basis of identity { the characteristics of peoples without a state (the Basques and the Scots) may change over time while their geographical boundaries remain in the same place. Groups such as Gypsies and Jews have no geographically defined frontiers yet retain strong boundary-maintaining mechanism. Distinctive human groups without states have come to be known as *minorities*” (Ibid: 5).

A Roma minority group is classified, according to Pierre George (1996), as “a minority without any specific geographical location, which nonetheless retains strong communications networks” (cited in Anderson Ibid: 5). Which boundary is more important in defining personal and group identity? Is it the one of a symbolic socio-cultural or the one of a state boundary? I suggest that crossing the border is a moment comprehended by different people differently. A territorial boundary may be encoded as fixed and stable. A socio-cultural boundary may be less absolute, and a language boundary may be put aside onto the periphery in some peoples’ views. In the others’ views the visible and invisible boundaries may be constructed antagonistically.

“I think that Roma are more adaptable than others. Even though we don't travel like our parents used to from one place to another. We don't need to stay in a new place for months to catch up and find the ways that things work. We need just a few weeks. For me, it was not a problem to come to England. But then I realised that some things are even worse than in Czech. Therefore I don't really think that this is a country I would love to live in for long and even to die here. I am simply disappointed, not because I am away from Czech but because I am in a place that is not like I dreamed about. I sometimes doubt if I am still in the West” (Berta, December 2002).

7. Migration: A Rite of Passage

I endeavour to disclose the contextual insights of a model '*rite of passage*' by Arnold van Gennep (1960) and Victor Turner (1969), its interconnections and phenomenological meanings to explain the process of migration – a territorial passage or transition from one place and one stage to another. A model *rite-of-passage* is a passage where the cultural values and identities in the relatively 'new' world can be asserted, formed or reinforced.

"Rites of passage is a ritual and symbolic transition between 'states' where transition is a process, a becoming, or even transformation. 'State' is a relatively fixed or stable condition. Separation comprises symbolic behaviour signifying the detachment of the individual or group either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure or a set of cultural conditions (a 'state')" (1969: 93-94).

Asylum seekers cross various borders and they pass through various stages that would, in a 'rites of passage' context, be called *separation*, *liminality* and *incorporation*. It is not only a transition from one relatively fixed or stable condition to another but also a transition between old and new environments that involves for many Roma asylum seekers a loss and regeneration.

7.1. The Separation Phase

In essence, many Czech and Slovakian Roma asylum seekers appear on the margin of the society in both old and new societies (those of the former Czechoslovakia and the UK), and they often apprehend feelings of 'alienation' that are mirrored in a visible state of *separation*. The transition of separation is shadowed by the boundaries. These boundaries are markers enhancing the sense of identity and identification that distinguish one group from another. Fundamentally, in the United Kingdom Roma appear to be marginalized and stigmatised twice over. The first is a social stigma portraying their asylum / refugee status, and the second is an ethnic or racial stigma as

they are Roma / Gypsies. Wallman (1978)²⁶ analyses the terms 'race' and 'ethnicity'. *Race* is what can be seen, *ethnicity* is only what is felt. In relation to a boundary creation Wallman explains:

"Sometimes the terms are used to distinct if not separate phenomena: where the boundary marks a difference between one cultural group and another cultural group, it is called an 'ethnic boundary' – the interface being that a confrontation of values is the main issue, and ethnicity 'only' a sense of identity. Where the boundary marks an objective difference, which is only to say a difference, which someone outside the relationship can see, then it is called a 'racial boundary'... Ethnicity is a reaction occurring where two sets of people, or individual members of two sets of people, come into contact or confrontation with each other. It is a felt boundary between them which involves both difference, and the meaning put upon difference" (Ibid: 202-203).

Eriksen (1999) raises an interesting point of ethnicity in relation to a minority groups' formation.

"In everyday language the word ethnicity still has a ring of 'minority issues' and 'race relations', but in social anthropology it refers to aspects of relationships between groups which consider themselves, and are regarded by others, as being culturally distinctive...**Majorities** and dominant peoples are, however, **no less 'ethnic' than minorities**²⁷" (Ibid: 34).

The pattern of encroaching separateness must be viewed from both sides: minority and majority. Evidently many Roma asylum seekers are the passive actors in so called 'integrative projects' for the minority disadvantaged groups that are often

²⁶ Wallman discusses the process of ethnicity in England in relation to race, and social relations called 'ethnic' or 'racial'.

²⁷ Authors' highlighting

organised by the majority – Gádže or non-refugees. Roma allude to *BEING* integrated *BY* the others. The social and cultural boundary is, then, frozen and the ice is harder to break. Anderson's concern is that "communities define themselves according to their self-perceived boundaries, which sometimes have been self-consciously created to promote a sense of distinctiveness and separateness" (1996: 4).

"When the Czech government came up with an idea for the special schools for those kids who are slow, have problems with speaking, it was meant for Roma because they speak Roma first and then we teach them Czech. Or we teach them both languages at once. In these zero grades there are just Cigáni children because they don't want them in normal schools... All these refugee and Roma events here in England are just to show the image of Gádže doing something for Cigáni or refugees and we are like in a ZOO. I see that they do it only for their own profit to get some money from Roma and refugee issues. They simply use us" (Honza, January 2003).

Van Gennep (1960) sees an individual placed in various sections of society:

"Sometimes the individual stands alone and apart from all groups; sometimes, as a member of one particular group, he is separated from the members of others. For group, as well as for individuals, life itself means to separate and to be reunited, to change form and condition, to die and to be reborn" (Ibid: 189).

Malkki refers to an article entitled 'The Refugee Experience: Defining the Parameters of a Field of Study,' where it is noted: '**Refugees are helped because they are helpless; they must display their need and helplessness**' (Barry Stein 1981: 327 cited in Malkki 1997). "This vision of helplessness is vitally linked to the constitution of speechlessness among refugees; helpless victims need protection, need someone to speak for them" (Ibid: 236). My provocative question is: *'Has anybody ever asked Roma if they want to be a part of the majority at all'?* Roma culture is today a subject learned at universities. Davidová (1998) underlines the importance of the collapse of

communism for Roma cultural enlightenment, recognition and visibility.²⁸ Nonetheless, many Roma perceive the recognition of their culture to be treated as a sort of engine for money, and Roma people are often exhibited similarly like objects in a museum.

"Sometimes I get so angry. People think that Cigani are unable, dumb and useless and that they need help from Gádže. Why? Why do they think we need help? What for? We are not miserable because there are more Gádže in the world. What we want is just equal rights but not in a way that we will be forced to assimilate. I hate the feeling of being used because I am exotic, and there are problems between non-exotics and us (Mariana). All these organisations do something for us but why don't they do it with us? We are the ones who know what we need. We don't need to be patronised by others who hardly understand. And another thing that drives me mad! Why do people see us as wretches who are totally lost in this world? (Honza, January 2003).

The transition between separateness to liminality is a way of unchaining from the spheres of lives in which people are involved today, to the imagined lives of tomorrow. This allows people to physically and imaginarily travel from one 'state' (in Turner's context) to another.

7.2. The Liminality Phase

Asylum seekers' experience of border crossing is a transition between the separation and the second phase that Victor Turner (1969) would call a '*liminal period*' where the 'passenger' passes through a realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state²⁹. The boundary functions to distinguish the insiders from the outsiders, and it is a separating factor. *Liminality* is a stage of reflection. For the Czech and Slovak Roma asylum seekers the phase **liminality** is a long process. It corresponds to what is called 'awaiting Home office decision on their asylum claim', which is

²⁸ "The most significant success of development of Roma culture was during the 90's when the Department of Roma culture at the Faculty of Pedagogic was founded in Nitra (Slovak Republic); Roma studies and language was established and included in the curriculum of the Faculty of Philosophy at Charles University; Roma museum in Brno; Roma theatre; Roma music and dance groups; Radio broadcast programme – 'Romale'; Roma literature (dictionary, academic literature, fairytales); Roma International participation etc." Davidová (1998)

²⁹ The rite of passage is consummated in the third phase '*aggregation*' (Turner 1969).

initiated after their arrival and it sometimes endure for four years. During this period, Roma asylum seekers are trapped between the processes of adaptation and marginality. These processes are, for some, bounded by the elements of reflexivity and homesickness. It is a matrix of reflection to their past lives and awareness of their identities.

"It was hard when we came. We didn't know anybody or anything. We didn't have anything either. But very soon we found how things work, I learned how to drive on the left side, and we got used to the system here" (Honza, May 2002).

"But don't forget to say that later you started to complain that you can't sit with a beer in your hand, look at the remarkable nature, or go mushrooming. We miss home and things that we normally have in Czech. We never thought about their importance, or that these things are that important to us. Just simple things, small things like Czech flavour to make the proper dumplings..." (Stepmother, May 2002).

"Losing country, community, family, status, property, culture and even a sense of personal identity, replacements for these losses must be created for refugees' lives to continue, as well as for adjustment to the new and changing circumstances of their lives in the places they now find themselves" (Camino and Krulfeld 1999: x).

The displacement of asylum seekers and their refugee life, accompanied by merciless fear, anxiety and ambiguity constitutes an important aspect of their culture. "Liminality breaks the cake of costumes and enfranchises speculation" (Turner 1969:106).

"Native culture in the concept of liminality, [where] the temporarily stepping outside of one's normal socio-cultural context of life, is regarded as an important part of it [the rite of passage] which serve to sharpen the cultural competence of the participants" (Olwig 1997:34)

"You know, I sometimes loose track of where I stand. Here or there I am sometimes scared of other people – of Whites and of those 'higher'³⁰. But you know what is great? We still have our energy and desire to live fully, to play Gypsy and Czech songs³¹. This keeps our spirit up, keeps us together" (Sasa – young boy from the Roma band in Newcastle, June 2002).

A migration, in particular an asylum seekers' rite of passage, creates a grid of boundaries. This grid embodies a snowball effect, when one boundary is crossed and the other emerges, or the path is disrupted by two or more boundaries at once.

I have come to the conclusion that in essence the liminal period cannot be viewed as only one phase. It is not only a persistence of Home office decisions on asylum claims, but is a set of overlapping liminalities where boundary spanning is employed. A simple interaction of a Roma asylum seeker with a police officer, for example, can bring this Roma to a 'state' (in Turners' context) of liminality. The same day a meeting with another Roma migrant can bring him to another 'state' of liminality. I have said earlier: the liminal period in the case of Roma asylum seekers in the UK can span as much as four years but I did not pay attention to the fact that during these four years the patterns of separateness, liminalities, and also incorporations are in flux. These patterns that create or re-create identities are countless, as are the identities. Rite of passage brings us now to its last phase, which in Turner and Van Gennep's context is more theoretical than in the lived realities of Roma asylum seekers.

7.3. The Phase of Incorporation or a Phase of Repatriation?

The final phase is incorporation – "the successful transition to the new status of group is publicly recognised. In the third phase the passage is consummated" (Turner 1967:94). This phase is, nevertheless, not accomplished in the case of Roma asylum seekers. **Incorporation** is usually incomplete in the territory of the United Kingdom, since Roma asylum seekers are often deported back to the Czech or Slovak Republics. Another phase of the passage emerges instead.

³⁰ Czech word 'ti nahore' - in English translation supremacy

³¹ In June 2002 my Indian friend and I were at a rehearsal of the Roma band in Newcastle. The band started to play Czech and Slovakian songs of the famous singers. I was invited to join them, and to sing for them. The great and energetic atmosphere was accompanied by passion, and later the Czechoslovakian anthem was voiced in the rooms.

Deported Roma asylum seekers enter a phase of **repatriation**, as part of the boundary grid, which constitutes both a separation and a liminal period. They physically enter this phase but inside, in their heads, the idea of deportation and repatriation is vehemently encoded, which influences the dimension of physical settlement and mental belonging.

"We don't know if immigration comes tomorrow, or today. They might be on their way now so you can see how they treat refugees. But they usually come in the mornings. I sometimes ask myself if I really want to get more into this life here in England. I live my life as it comes but it is sometimes hard to imagine that once you are deported, you have to start again from scratch. Of course you have friends at home but they would be jealous of me that I was here, so you can't really trust them. I don't know if I ever go back whether I would stay in the same town I lived in for years before flying over here. I know one thing for sure: it will be tough!" (A Roma man from Pilsen (Western Bohemia) who was expecting a Home Office final decision that week. His asylum claim was not approved and he was deported back to the Czech Republic).

Those deported Roma asylum seekers may try their 'luck' and undertake the adventurous trip to the UK again; they may surrender to settling in the Czech or Slovak Republics; or they may commence a new 'asylum' journey to another country. Whichever journey the asylum seeker chooses, he or she enters the processes of separation, liminality, and perhaps repatriation. Simultaneously to these journeys the identities are formed, re-created or reinforced. These phases create, then, a never-ending magic circle. What interests me is whether the *microclimate* of the 'asylum' rite of passage is, perhaps, hidden in the *macro-climate* of the ordinary inherent rite of passage that everybody constantly experiences in his or her life cycle. He or she may enter a kind of 'double' passage. But to explore this multiple dimension of one's passage I consider a challenge which would require another study in a further project.

8. Lived Asylum Lives

Close encounters of migration and Diaspora are engaged in the imagining world, the invention and realisation of culture, the creation of new identities, and examination of social and ethnic status. The record of Roma asylum seekers' belonging, their rite of passage, is a rich and complex story difficult to explain, "how cultural images and concepts are engendered and deployed in shifting social and cultural contexts" (Paerregaard 1997:56).

"What produces anthropological knowledge is our understanding of how different forms of inventive and analytical practices mutually condition each other, and yet differ because of distinct commitments and devotion to those who not only invent and analyse culture but also live it" (Ibid: 56).

In this chapter we have traced Roma asylum seekers' journeys and their attained experience. These journeys are accompanied by infinite visible and invisible borders and by the chain of restrictions and rules to control and prevail upon asylum seekers. They represent a self-reflexive 'chapter' of the asylum seekers' lived realities. During these journeys, this rite of passage, adventure trip, or whatever we call it, Roma asylum seekers do not lose hope and they fight sorely until the end. Because of their afflicted fights to overstep the limits of asylum policy – to endeavour to utterly unchain themselves from the shackles of governmental restrictions and restraints, it leads us to the next chapter.

This chapter attempts to disclose inventiveness of Roma asylum seekers in manipulating the state power system, in particular the economic system. I share what I have learned as a total outsider that has no concept of the asylum life: life that is lived dearly with passion, sympathy and emotions. Life which is certainly not ordinary.

CHAPTER III.

Multiple Roles of Vouchers – Multiple Identities

www.bbc.news.co.uk (Monday, 3 April, 2000, 13:10 GMT 14:10 UK)

Refugee vouchers 'inhumane'



"I live today, because I might not be here tomorrow. Money will be and we won't be. Why not enjoy your life now?" (My stepmother in April 2002)

1. Borderline and Immigration: What are your Reasons for Coming to the UK?

It was around three o'clock in the morning on the 5th of July, 1995. I was standing in front of the immigration officer in Dover (South of England) holding my passport and Czech-English dictionary. I was a sixteen-year old startled girl coming from a small and very quiet town in the south of the Czech Republic to work for a Jewish family in London as an Au pair. The truth is that I was very ambitious and goal-oriented with a desire to learn the language and attain experience during two months of summer vacation in the 'Western world', without my parents. At the passport control in Dover I tried to explain with my very poor English that my arrival in the UK happened hastily, therefore my host family had not sent the invitation letter I was supposed to have produced (of course I did not have the slightest idea of this incumbency upon all non-residential or non-EU passengers). Yet today, I wonder what made the immigration officers decide to give me a six months' tourist visa. I entered the country without any formal letter, with only twenty British sterling pounds in my pocket.

Reflecting on this experience, and comparing the latter experiences (acquired five years later) affected by the increasing immigration to the UK, I am fairly sure that today (under such conditions) I would have never obtained permission to enter the United Kingdom. Furthermore I am convinced that the amount of cash I was taking from home would have hardly satisfied the immigration officers enough to grant me a visa or to treat me as anything other than a potential economic exploiter of the United Kingdom.

Amongst those individuals who did not satisfy the British immigration officers at the borderline, and whose arrival was seen as rather suspicious, belong some of my friends. For instance, one is a PhD student who spent five years studying in England, and who was offered a high level qualified permanent job at the university in his home

country. After seven hours of being interviewed he was forced to wait for the next flight. He was then sent back to his own country with the record 'Deported from the United Kingdom'. Or another example, when some Czech Roma women, who initially came (having all required formal documents) for a one month visit to their Czech Roma friends and relatives in England, found themselves to be the subject of humiliation:

Honza's sister and mother were compelled to choose another enterprising way in order to legally enter the country. Their initial aim of the journey was, under the unpleasant circumstances that followed, converted into another:

"We were saving money to fly over here for months...we were interviewed for two and half hours...Eventually they said that we could stay in the country for three days only...this drove us mad so we decided to apply for asylum" (Honza's sister and mother, March 2002. See more from the interview on P. 60 in Chapter II.).

The asylum procedure starts at the border where each individual who seeks asylum is interviewed. All personal belongings (including money) that the asylum seeker carries to England must be reported at the immigration office at the border.

"A friend of mine called me from Czech when he was deported. He warned me not to save money because of what had happen to him when he was deported. He couldn't take anything more than he came with. It was in the forms from the first interview at the airport. He had to leave money there or spend it all at the airport. Simply, you can't take anything more out of England than you came with" (Vit, April 2002)

This journey was not only about an asylum seeker who appeared on an island; registered with the immigration office at the airport; went through the bureaucratic political procedure; was sent to town 'X' and accommodated in place 'Y'. Later, after hours of queuing at the local immigration office and social services he left with very limited information and was given voucher books worth 'Z' pounds a week.

This snowball effect story starts with 'X', 'Y', and 'Z', and once the political border is crossed the story continues with other social and cultural boundary crossings. Why? Because there is a natural need to reach the feeling of 'belonging' especially in a

totally new environment. And because “all social boundaries are characterised by an interface line between inside and outside, as well as by an identity line between ‘us’ and ‘them’ (Wallman 1978:207 cf. Ross 1975 cited in Donnan and Wilson 2001), and people need to balance this line.

The border crossings I am looking at in this chapter are both economic and social. My effort is to look at “*bricolage* rather than brokerage, formed from the vision of the anthropologist as a handyman who can help repair the damage done by professionals” (Hart 1986:354). The handyman in my context applies not to an anthropologist but to an asylum seeker who appears in the United Kingdom to claim his or her rights, threatened by the ‘professionals’ - in my view - the British government.

“Economy, which revolves about making, holding, using, sharing, exchanging, and accumulating valued objects and services, includes more than standard market theory suggests. Anthropology plays a special role in broadening our understanding of material life, for the less-recognised processes are displayed with special clarity in the situation ethnographers study” (Gudeman 2001:1).

I am intrigued to find the ways that standards of economic life and a move from one political and economical system to another can disclose the patterns of identities.

2. Economy and Identity

“Migration implies a radical change in objective circumstances [and] neither subjective nor an objective account of this encounter is adequate by itself” (Bottomley 1992:38). Every individual “carries the collective history of her group or class, the sense of one’s place described by Bourdieu as *habitus*” (Ibid: 38). Roma asylum seekers had moved into different political and economical systems with already existing schemes and well-developed power relations. They crossed the border to an imaginary land and they were caught into the notion of a symbolic system that politically and economically separate and categorises people into ‘outsiders’ and ‘insiders’. The political transparency within the institutional settings and economic pressure creates power

imbalances between these two groups – those who do and those who do not belong. These external forces manipulate asylum seekers' whole existence and their identity. They become a target of various labels and markers emanating from the global judgements associated with existing stereotypes and prejudices. The political label of an asylum seeker correlates to 'illegal', and the economic label to what can be summed up as 'exploitation' of the United Kingdom, or in other words 'ripping off the country'. Labelling of this group of individuals is in flux, and it has impacted on fitting and self-fitting people into various 'boxes of identities'.

“Identity is a both psychological and sociological term. It helps the individual to produce order in his or her own individual life. On the other hand it helps to place the individual within groups or involves identification with a collectivity” (Guibernau and Rex 1999:4)

If we endeavour to pursue identity and find similar patterns of a particular group of individuals, we unconsciously use invisible labels and markers according to which we fit individuals into small boxes – boxes created by intolerance and ignorance. We tend to designate things; name people and species; define relationships; class statuses and roles; appoint functions and positions; mark different races and ethnicities; and inescapably attribute people identity. This need to 'place' someone somewhere is a pattern of natural phenomena peppered by the false image of homogeneity, especially in 'united' England.

In parallel with one another, ethnicity and identity are conceptualised by individuals who place themselves in some imaginary boxes. Self-identity is often a desire to fit into box 'A' or box 'B' - being a part of those boxes – to 'belong' somewhere as I partially explained in a previous chapter (p. 48).

“When we think of our national identity or that of other European peoples (with or without states) we imagine a near mystic assimilation of territory, language and people” (Stewart 1997a: 85)

Truly every simple individual is complex. Every individual lives in political, economical and social categories, cultural terms and a symbolic system that is apparently self-evident. Furthermore each individual places different weight on this 'vacuum' of power relations. The miscellaneous "meaning[s] are produced through categories of perception and appreciation that are themselves social products" (Bottomley 1992:38).

Although on the one hand my informants theoretically constitute one category – asylum seekers - accompanied by a variety of labels, on the other hand, practically, the nuance of such a category of individual perception differs. The heterogeneity of understanding of social, political and cultural values and relations is vivid. For instance what one person finds a dangerous threat or a continuous concern, the other is perhaps oblivious, indifferent or apathetic to. To demonstrate this diversity and difference of understandings I discuss the concept of a theory and practice of British economic system for refugees (including refugees' own terms). I attempt to show how "experience of one can mediate the meaning of the other: how wider political and economic forces impinge upon locality and vice versa" (Cohen A. P. cited in Donnan and Wilson 1998:12).

3. Historical Approaches to Economy

Over the years and still today, the increasing number of asylum seekers travelling to the United Kingdom is clearly unsustainable. Britain is a European magnet for the global migrants and asylum seekers.

"The independent think-tank Migration Watch UK predicts that nearly 250,000 non-EU immigrants enter Britain every year. The MPs fear of 'social unrest' could erupt across the land unless solutions are found by the Government" (Cecil 2003:9).

The state created restrictions in the asylum process and strengthened control measures over those who do not 'belong' and those who want to belong. The transparency of inherent state power relations over the 'others' who are accused of

exploiting the British social benefit system and “welfare system [that] encourages many economic migrants to exploit the weaknesses in the system under the name of ‘asylum seekers’” (Ibid: 9) is visible through the migration policy developed by the British Home Office. The multicultural **United** Kingdom is ruled by the developed notion of such limitations in a way not to close doors to incomers, in order to preserve the existing British historical ‘**multi-culturalism**’.

“Yet, from 1963 to the end of the 1980s, a minimum of 30,000 blacks and Asians entered Britain every year – and this regular intake, layered over the immigration ‘bulge’ of the ‘beat the ban’ generation, set the terms of multicultural Britain, or the ‘magpie society’” (Harding 2000:51).

In the same vein, the UK attempts to circumvent jeopardising the political, economical and welfare system in order to keep the historical richness of a British monarchy. The striking propaganda of peace, justice and non-violence is in climax, however, “while England is becoming more multicultural, second and even third-generation immigrants are still among the most deprived in society” (Frith 2003).³² The proportion of figures and statistics of increasing racial attacks and the extremist solutions of the extremist parties, such as the BNP (British National Party)³² reveals Britain’s antagonism and instability.

4. The Voucher Enlightenment

One of the governmental’ endeavours to accomplish socio-economical and political security of the United Kingdom was the legalization of the voucher scheme³³. This invisible ‘fence’ built by the British Government might be viewed as a circumventing movement against the mass asylum applications and a discouragement for new applicants. “The voucher scheme was justified by the Government on the grounds that it would deter unfounded asylum applications” (Refugee Council Press Release 19 July 2001). It is appropriate to give theoretical insights of the voucher scheme to disclose both its efficiency and futility.

³² For illustration see the attached newspapers articles in appendix III.

³³ For illustration, see the photocopy of the voucher in appendix I.

“The immigration and Asylum Act 1999 established a centrally administered asylum support scheme – the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) – the twin pillars of which were the voucher system of support for destitute asylum seekers and the policy of dispersing asylum seekers. NASS has been in operation since April 2000” (Refugee Council Press Release, December 2001).

The controversial voucher system was introduced on the 3rd of April, 2000. “The controversial voucher scheme is run by the Sodexho company, Sodexho Pass Limited, of the French catering billionaire Pierre Bellon” (Bright and Walsh, September 2nd 2001)³⁴. The value of vouchers was 70% of the basic rate of income support to meet the basic living needs whilst asylum seekers await a Home Office decision on their asylum claim. The Home Office supports asylum seekers with accommodation with Council Houses that are based anywhere in England, hence asylum seekers have no choice over the place or area they live in. “A single adult was also acquainted of a weekly allowance of £10 to £14 in cash” (Refugee Council Press Release, autumn 2002).

The voucher scheme constitutes paper coupons only. There are no voucher coins in this monetary system. The asylum seekers, therefore, are forced to balance the total amount of the shopping with the total value of vouchers. The pauperised asylum seekers are not eligible to claim British coins. The value of vouchers varies: from the minimum £5 voucher to the maximum £20 vouchers, and this amount is restricted to specific goods the voucher is worth. For instance a family would receive £25 in vouchers for clothes and £45 of food vouchers a week. The level of voucher support depends on the total number of family members. Vouchers are used only in designated shops that “sign up to the voucher scheme in order to make money, which brags about how shops can pocket any change left over from the voucher’s value” (Socialist Worker July 29th 2000).

“This [support] is just 36.54 a week for a single adult. Vouchers are used only in designated shops, which means impoverished asylum seekers cannot shop in the cheapest

³⁴ For illustration see some facts and figures in the appendixes IV.

shops and markets [unlike] other people on low incomes. The 'no-change' policy added to asylum seekers' problems because they end up paying more for their shopping than anyone else. The supermarkets "profit[ed] at the expense of asylum seekers" by keeping the change on vouchers" (Refugee Council Press Release 3 April and 19 July 2001).

"Can you imagine yourself standing in a queue, thinking and counting if your shopping [total price of shopping] matches to your vouchers? You have a twenty pound voucher and your shopping is, let's say £19.50, so you go back and find something for 0.50 halír³⁵ because I don't want them to have the benefit from my voucher.... It was horrible, going backwards and forwards to match my shopping precisely to what my voucher is valued...." (Berta and Jirka, April 2002)

A Somali woman reported to the Times:

"I suffer from the indignity of returning some tins to the shelf as I have gone over my limit by 12p" (McGrory August 28th 2001)

The striking articles and critical commentary discussions in newspapers (i.e. The Guardian, The Observer, The Times, and The Independent) and Internet sites (see bibliography) on 'asylum industry' graduated.

"The refugees are in effect a captive market; prevented from shopping around. The icing on the cake is that the stores are not allowed to give change. So a refugee who buys, say, £9.50 worth of goods with a £10 voucher, is handing the store an extra 50p profit" (Brown, September 28th 2000)"

³⁵ The currency of money my informants usually referred to is equivalent to Czech currency: korunka (Crowns) = pounds; halír = pence]

4.1. The Theoretical Insight of Vouchers: Restrictions and Restraints

In principle, the voucher is an attribute of socio-political authority that restricts and controls how and where money is spent. It is a means of payment that concedes one to buy commodities but at the same time it dictates what sort of commodities the asylum seeker is permitted to buy. It is a device to portray refugee identity, and overall it contributes to stereotypes and prejudices.

To comprehend vouchers, it is indispensable to look at money too. I echo Douglas (1967) who contrasts modern money with primitive money - raffia cloth – among the Lele of the Kasai region of the Congo – with which they paid fees and fines and tribute as money. Money, judged by Douglas, is “an instrument of freedom, a set of open possibilities of acquisition. It is in the nature of money to flow freely, to be like water, to permeate” (Ibid: 121). Douglas explains:

“Raffia units did not normally circulate in a market context. They were entitlements to a series of social prerogatives – a kind of coupons – that are restricted in their flow. Money represents general purchasing power over all marketed goods; coupons restrict and channel the purchasing power of money. By their nature coupons represent closed doors, restriction, and control.... But confusingly this opposition of money and coupons in their basic nature is lost in their actual functioning at any time. For money can be used as an instrument of control, closing doors and blocking outlets for individual energies, while coupons can easily come to represent purchasing power and become barely distinguishable from money.... Primitive money is evidently a very imperfect form of money” (Ibid: 119-121 and 122).

In theory, vouchers represent closed doors, control, and restrictions. They are accepted only for a limited range of services, goods in designated shops, and only a limited number of persons (asylum seekers) are allowed to use them as means of payment. Theoretically vouchers are not a vehicle of freedom and choice, like money. It is an invention in which the state attempts to create security and political power over refugees by restricting their economic activities. Both coupons and money in Douglas’

context exist in both ways - as instruments of control but also as instruments of purchasing power. Money and coupons, hence, function in both economic (monetary) and socio-political ways. The voucher is a means of payment (monetary), and in parallel it is a symbol of political power – a sort of state identity.

4.2. Two Sides of the Coin and Three Sides of the Voucher

Vouchers carry different stigmas and thus are visibly distinguishable from money. When we look at a British one-pound coin, the head of Queen Elizabeth is marked on one side. The other side of the coin tells the amount the coin is worth. Money, in this respect is two-sided. One side allows money to flow, to be exchanged for anything by anyone. The other side demonstrates state control. Vouchers, in contrary are multi-sided, as we will see later in this chapter.

Hart (1986), intrigued by Malinowski's example³⁶, juxtaposes "exotic facts and western folk theories". Hart's theory on two-sided coin contributes to a discussion on three-sided voucher.

"One side of the coin is '*heads*', the symbol of the political authority which minted the coin, on the other side is '*tail*' the precise specification of the amount the coin is worth as payment in exchange. One side reminds us that states underwrite currencies and that money is originally a relation between persons and society, a token perhaps. The other reveals the coin as a thing, capable of entering into definite relations with other things, as a quantitative ration independent of the persons engaged in any particular transaction. The coin has two sides for a good reason – both are indispensable. Money is at the same time an aspect of relation between persons and thing detached from persons" (Hart 1986: 354)

³⁶ "Malinowski is concerned about the exchange economy which functioned without money and markets as we know them in Argonauts of the Western Pacific" (Hart 1986 cited in Gudeman 1998:353). Hart defends the heads and tails arguments also in Malinowski's context of the Trobriand economy, and he adds, "Although there are no coins in Trobriand economy, the two sides of the coin have their counterparts in local economic institutions. There is political authority and there are markets of a sort" (Ibid: 365)

Hart's two-sided coin has its own symbols, in which each side signifies a specific meaning. The voucher, similar to coin money, is a means of payment (monetary functions) and state authorisation discloses its political identity. Money still exists as impersonal and anonymous in contrast to vouchers, which represent and unconsciously frame the symbolic identities of refugees.

4.3. The Asylum Seekers Invisibly Tattooed on Their Foreheads: Humiliating and Stereotyping Stigmas

Vouchers considerably impacted on asylum seekers impoverishment. Furthermore, they betrayed the construction of asylum seekers' identities. Their stigmatisation had contributed to stereotyping and prejudicing those who did not belong to the 'normal' economic system and to the United Kingdom. The 'outsiders' who were not part of this system straightforwardly labelled voucher holders as 'refugees', coupled with strong images of 'aliens' or 'economic migrants'. The gap between 'we' and 'they' deepened, as well as the government's social exclusion, discrimination and race relations. The voucher system was criticised by the human rights activists and some asylum seekers themselves.

"It is now one year since the controversial vouchers were introduced and our experience and research clearly illustrates that the system is expensive and bureaucratic, that it humiliates asylum seekers and that it undermines the Government's strategies on social exclusion and child poverty" (Refugee Council Press Release 3 April 2001).

The rich and unparalleled evidence of vouchers and its consequential patterning - humiliation and discrimination - is experienced and expressed in verbatim by asylum seekers:

"It is true that the voucher labels us – refugees. But we [the family] got used to it. In some places, when we pay with vouchers, people around look at us as if we are strangers, in other places they don't care... Well, at home in Ústí [town in the North of Bohemia] they always looked at us as though we are

different because we are black..." (Stepmother, interview before vouchers were scrapped, April 2002).

Consequently, my stepmother Mariana expressed two components patterning a double discrimination. The first one is the voucher that portrays her social identity, and the second one is the colour of her skin that portrays her ethnic identity. These two elements attribute Mariana two identities – asylum seeker and Roma.

"...It feels like having a red spot in the middle of your forehead to be different than the others..." (Olek, February 2002)

Evidently, not only Roma but also asylum seekers of other nationalities sympathised and shared similar feelings towards vouchers. One Afghani girl said to the Refugee Council:

"It is like getting a stamp saying you don't belong" (Reported in Refugee Council Press, July 2001).

5. The Collapse of Vouchers: Three Models

The efficiency of the voucher system had crumbled within a few months of its legalization, and in order to elude economic exploitation of the United Kingdom, alternative changes in the voucher system for refugees and asylum seekers had gradually been made. So far (in June 2003), the voucher scheme has been remodelled in total three times since April 2000.

The first type of vouchers for refugees coming to the United Kingdom, issued on 3rd April 2000, was legally exchangeable for goods only. The Home Office was aware of the voucher scandals mainly regarding the stigma effect, which appeared weekly in British Press. Human rights activists and some of the asylum seekers themselves undertook long demonstrations and campaigns to 'scrap vouchers' (i.e. Oxfam, Red Cross etc.)³⁷. Hence, the Home Office decided to find alternative ways to banish vouchers stigmatisation in the public spheres but at the same time to 'keep an eye' on

³⁷ For illustration see appendix IV.

the asylum benefit system. Yet, the asylum 'tattoo' represented by vouchers did not disappear.

“Although several options for replacements were considered, including automated credit transfers, cash payments through post offices were chosen as the most practical. The Home Secretary, David Blunkett, announced on the 3rd April 2002 that the voucher system is scrapped” (BBC News, 8th April 2002).

The second type of vouchers represented voucher books with the identification bar codes on the top of the book pages. On the top of each voucher was written in capital letters “This is not a voucher” (see appendix I.). These voucher books were exchangeable for cash at post offices. Some of my informants were still using this type of voucher book in December 2002.

The third and the latest type of vouchers were introduced during the summer 2002. This voucher is a kind of plastic card, and it represents an automatic transfer into the asylum seekers personal 'account' at the post office. The asylum seeker is identified by the voucher card at the post office when collecting cash. This voucher card specifies the asylum seeker's name, ID number, and photograph.

If I take into consideration all three types of vouchers, I see that the voucher to some degree mirrors a pattern of personalisation and it does not act anonymously as ordinary money does. The first type of voucher discloses the asylum seekers name, the second voucher distinguishes one asylum seeker from another by their personal ID number, and finally the plastic voucher card visualises his or her physical identity – the photograph reveals the asylum seeker's head. These patterns of vouchers divulge asylum seekers' identity; they make them visible and hence somewhat different. The betrayal of identity via vouchers is similar to the identification of Jewish people during the Second World War. The Jewish star visibly distinguished those of other ethnicity and race. The fundamental approach to identifying one group from another has a long history. The anti-Semitic and anti-refugee ideologies created 'markers of identities' – Yellow stars and paper vouchers.

6. Digitalised Identities

When we enter the realm of money, we can view the symbol of power relations, and the value of money as an aspect of everyday life. “[Money] – a measure of value, a means of payment and medium of exchange brings us back to Aristotle’s original measure of value: *need*” (Narotzky 1998: 60). In the monetary system, we penetrate into the realm of “power of the expectation of others and the power of the state and large organisations” (Carrier 2001:6). Money is a “symbol of something intangible, not just a thing like a lump of coal” (Hart 1986: 361). The voucher system is bound up with the identity of an asylum seeker, and it is the expression of state policy emphasising the role of law and government intervention. “Money [and vouchers]³⁸ are commonly associated with the state, and hence is both national and political” (Carrier 2001:6).

Hart (1986) argues that:

“It is now easier to evade state control at all levels of economy, and money has become less anonymous, more personalised. Personalisation of money as information technology catches up with the proliferation of transactions – is typified by the spread of plastic money in our lives. Now a seller can phone a computer and decide on the spot whether to extend credit to someone he has never seen before. ... We must now add the fear of being defined by machines processing digitalised identities (Ibid: 358).

In today’s society, money might be less impersonal and anonymous. Today’s money exists in the new information technology of payment via credit cards, bank and computer transfers: “It is these frames, both the ones stamped on Hart’s coin and others, that endow money with the attributes that it has, that turn lump of metal into a coin, that turn a set of electronic interactions into a monetary transfer” (Carrier 2001: 2). Money could, then, produce fear due to its non-anonymity - digitalising identities by machines. Or is it maybe a fear and/or an anxiety of trust we have before clicking and pressing the right buttons to transfer money via such transactions? What sort of identities, in Hart’s

³⁸ I consider vouchers, in this respect, also as a medium of exchange and unit of value.

context, do machines digitalise? It is perhaps identification of our names and the balance of our bank accounts, but I am not reluctant to say that it does not digitalise our social status, which is a significant contributor to our identities.

Personalisation of credit cards and of the voucher plastic cards mirrors each other in various ways: the credit card patterns an anxiety of transaction of money deposited in a bank account, whilst the voucher credit card is rather a contributor to fear of disclosing 'refugee' status that traps asylum seekers into being a subject of discrimination. This trap, however, represents a sort of network where social and economic relations develop.

7. Economic Networks and Social Interactions

The physical existence of both money and vouchers function as a medium of exchange. Economic transactions and exchanges contribute in developing and/or strengthening social relations. "All enduring social relations involve transactions... All acts have an economic aspect and a social and cultural aspect" (Belshaw 1965:5). These acts are fruitfully enriched and mediated by economical, social and cultural exchanges that "becomes an aspect of behaviour which provides interconnections [and] they may be thought of as a network holding society together" (Ibid: 6).

In any means of transactions, either in money or in vouchers,
"money [and vouchers] are a medium of exchange when
transactions between people involve the transfer of money
[and vouchers] as a part of the transaction itself; that is to
say, when money [and vouchers] are used as a unit of value"
(Carrier 2001:3)

A theoretical overview of money and vouchers, their relations and contradictions is to a high degree rather problematic. The real existence of vouchers versus money, and the transactions in everyday lives is a matter for dispute. What is more important, and for my field study, relevant, are the ways "people think about those transactions" (Carrier 2001:11) and the ways of developing rapports between individuals and groups that I attempt to reveal in the latter part of this chapter.

Gewertz and Errington (1995) contrast shell money with modern money. They look at the ways that some Tolai people perceive their money in Papua New Guinea. For Tolai, the shell money is not only a medium of exchange (reciprocity of money and goods/services) but also a symbol of social life. The vivid monetary and socio-political concept of Tolai money is embodied in their culture and society.

“Shell money is a means of establishing and maintaining social relationships and for Tolai is a cultural property and it symbolises their national identity” (Ibid: 175).

To some degree, we will see how vouchers too (similarly to shell money) contributed to the development of relationships. The voucher system turned out to be a vehicle for reinforcing economic relations, strengthening the cultural and social rapports (for instance with the Indian community of immigrants, discussed later in the following sections of this chapter).

8. The Controversial Perception of Vouchers: Comprehending its Re-modelling

My curiosity of Roma refugees' perception of vouchers heightened, especially regarding the continuous scrapping and reforming of vouchers *ex post facto*. Most Roma asylum seekers comprehended the Home Office's subsequent measures as an act of preventing the voucher scheme from possible corruption.

*“If you lost a voucher, I mean the one we exchanged for money at the post, some people claimed extra vouchers. They call it emergency vouchers. Well, but later people used this advantage and tried to make bigger profits. Other people also used to say that someone had stolen his voucher. I am sure that they [Home Office] got fed up with us. They again chewed it over to invent something smarter that we can't easily profit from [my stepmother clarified her understanding of 'we': **Roma – every refugee does it!**]...And later the plastic voucher cards with your name, picture and number appeared for us. It's true that the system is now better controlled, so far”!* (October 2002)

Voucher stigma and its 'discriminative' patterns turned out to be a serious obstacle for the majority of my informants who self-consciously associate their identity with patterns of humiliation, ignorance and intolerance. Yet it is significant to stress the question of identity. For some individuals the voucher is neither a threat nor a stigma of their refugeeness. They might share some of the cultural attributes of the group collectively. In many cases they act as individuals and not as a group. It is crucial to point out that my informants comprehend vouchers in a variety of ways. Their perceptions of things are not necessarily coherent with the other members of the group. Money or vouchers, then, might mean different things for a refugee group or asylum seeker group, as well as for the individuals in these groups.

The reflexivity and vitality of recounted stories on vouchers make up a brilliant mosaic where its pieces are of different colours. Nevertheless, the material the mosaic is made of is identical. Roma asylum seekers experiences are different, which colours the mosaic. They carry on identical social status - 'asylum seekers', which gives the mosaic a single material. Overall the complete jigsaw of the society is mixed, and diverse materials overlap. The patterns of the vouchers appear in a refugee society as a complex puzzle. Some Roma asylum seekers apprehend its meanings and functions differently than the others and vice versa.

8.1. The Meaningful or Meaningless Vouchers?

For some of my informants the voucher means nothing but a piece of paper that is transacted for goods. They may perceive the strong state power relations to control how and where voucher support is treated. For the others vouchers symbolise dealing and exchanging practices, freedom in converting vouchers into money. In any case, finding the routes to bypass the voucher system was crucial, and once the way was found it became almost an everyday practice.

"Vouchers are complex for those who do not understand how other system works, if you do not know people and do not create great networks³⁹ it is not in language ability. You have hands and legs" (Vit, January 2002).

³⁹ Czech word *známosti* = connections.

Turning to the issue of scrapping and remodelling vouchers for the last two years since 2000, my observations oscillate around the various insights, understanding and preferences applied by Roma asylum seekers. Some Roma asylum seekers preferred the first type of vouchers where dealings and economic exchanges were in a stream. The others favoured the cash voucher books. It is evident that not all my informants entered the country of asylum at the same time. Therefore, their experiences, sensitivity and consciousness towards the voucher system varies.

A twenty year-old Roma refugee man Filip came with his wife Hana in March 2000, before the voucher scheme was first introduced. They went through the bureaucratic asylum procedure, and registered with the social services. Their asylum support was granted by a so-called Income Support Book (ISB) rather than the voucher books. The ISB was exchangeable for money at the post office, similar to the second form of vouchers⁴⁰.

"For me it is better to receive books that I can exchange for money. I can buy things wherever I want to, I don't have to queue because I have a voucher. I would not stand it, I think. Just imagine you are holding a piece of paper that says look everybody; I'm a dumb refugee! Can you imagine? Moreover, poor those with vouchers, they can hardly save any money..." Later he suggests: *"Of course they [Roma refugees] can save but they can't save as much and send some korunky to Czech as we do"* (March 2002).

Filip had never had the experience of using either the first or the second type of vouchers; he straightforwardly creates a picture of the refugee who struggles with vouchers. He imagines himself being labelled as "dumb refugee" incapable of savings and supporting relatives at home.

8.2. Transactors: Indiáni and Roma Asylum Seekers

"The significance of the economy is seen to lie in the transactions of which it is composed and therefore in the

⁴⁰ Filip was aware of several advantages whilst being on ISB, mainly having the opportunity of interest free loans: *Budget Loan*, *Crises Loan* and *Grant Loan*.

quality of relationships, which these transactions create, express, sustain and modify” (Firth 1967:4).

I have dedicated in this chapter extensively to the development of the voucher system in the United Kingdom, giving explanatory theoretical insights to the shifting and performative nature of the voucher ‘identity’. I perceive it as inevitably significant for understanding the everyday lived experiences of the asylum seekers trapped in the tentacles of the government. In this vein I bridge the gap between the theory and practice of vouchers. Up to this point I have given several hints about illicit practices of Roma asylum seekers attempting to untangle themselves from the governmental restrictions and control. In the following discussion I endeavour to discover **HOW** they attempt to do this.

The voucher system in the United Kingdom is a means of social benefit for the asylum seekers but it is also a device of social interactions. Such “an interaction of humans in relation to their environment constitutes the conditions and substances of society (Polanyi cited in Belshaw 1965: 15). On the one hand the voucher system discouraged and limited social relations and rapport between refugees and non-refugees. The feelings of shame and dishonour of being the ‘other’ and using an ‘other’ monetary medium overpowered the confidence of asylum seekers. On the other hand, the voucher system created social and economical networks and friendships between other socially disadvantaged and excluded people. More specifically, rapport developed between those groups who used or dealt with vouchers and lived under similar conditions. One of these groups, comprised immigrants from Indonesia who ran their grocery businesses in England. I cannot be sure what nationalities these shop owners had since I never participated in their interactions with Roma asylum seekers. My informants claim that according to the physical features and also some language similarities they come from India. “*Some words, like names or counting, sounds like our Romanes. They must be from Asia, from India, like we came if you did not know!*” (Jirka, April 2002). All my informants call this group of immigrants *Indiáni*.

“They look like we do, also black. The first time I met one of them I thought he is a Cigán, so I talked to him in Czech. He did not understand, so I tried in Romanes. Than I understood that he might not be from Czech or Slovakia

at all. So in my broken English I talked to him and he says: No English, Pakistan!" (Filip, November 2001).

The first type of voucher encouraged economic dealings and exchanges between Roma asylum seekers and *Indiáni* in such a way that both interested sides gleaned a profit from such dealings.

"Very easy. You go with your voucher to the Indiáni shop and he gives you £15 cash for a £20 voucher. It was always easier if you had a bigger amount of voucher, than the deals were more reasonable" (Vit, January 2002).

Despite the fact that asylum seekers lost five pounds from their twenty pound voucher, he would still find it easier and more sensible to be engaged in exchanges and dealings with *Indiáni* rather than to spend his voucher for goods that he might not need or want. "Some things, such as water, have high use value but low exchange value, whereas other things, such as diamonds, have low use value but high exchange value" (Smith 1776:33 cited in Belshaw 1965). The voucher turned out to have a high exchange value once the ways to circumvent its restrictions and control were found.

But what happened to the voucher in the *Indiáni* shop? I gleaned understanding about the voucher transactions, and penetrated into the symbolism behind asylum seeker and *Indiáni* dealings, which I discuss in the next section.

"Of course Indiáni did not use our vouchers in their shop but they used food, which we could get from vouchers. I explain: Indian goes to Tesco, Safeway or other big supermarkets and buys food from vouchers and than he goes to his little shop and sell the food. Isn't it clever? He had profit from us, and he can sell his food for more than it is in Tesco. And we get profit too, because we don't have to give away our voucher for food but for money" (Filip, January 2002)

8.3. Imprisoned Freedom of Vouchers

The first type of voucher is not only an instrument to savings and commodities that allows access to certain goods. Beyond being a medium of exchange and a means

of payment the inventiveness and creativity of Roma asylum seekers and *Indiáni* embodied the voucher with a symbol of freedom, and a symbol of social interactions. Some of the Roma asylum seekers developed friendships with *Indiáni* and vice versa.

“The connection between material effort and social relation is reciprocal because a specific social relation may constrain a given movement of goods, but a specific transaction suggests a particular social relation” (Sahlins 1965: 139 cited in Firth 1967:3).

“I and my family ended up on the street and had to find a place to stay. Social services told me to search for accommodation through papers or adverts ‘To let’. I hardly knew English, and the last thing I was bothered about was to go and buy papers! (Filip). One Roma friend brought Filip to an Indiáni shop, we exchanged some vouchers from NASS (National Asylum Support Service) and we became his regular customers. We asked about the accommodation. This Indián from the corner shop helped us a lot. The next day he gave us a key from this house (Hana, April 2002).

The second type of voucher and the *ex post facto* alternative changes made by the government had blocked business between *Indiáni* and asylum seekers. Economic dealings and exchanges between them were no longer practiced, nor were social relations established or maintained between these two groups any longer. Ironically, a new means of economic exchange emerged. This exchange involved different groups of transactors: asylum seekers and local authorities; and the illegal practices were no longer a part of the voucher system. The stigma effect was smoothed down, and in principle the labels and markers that were attributed to voucher holders lasted until the voucher book was converted for ordinary money at the post office.

“Why should I go to Indiáni when they changed the system? The food there is too expensive and now I can buy anything I want without a sticker of ‘refugee’ and where I want without giving the supermarkets opportunity to make profits from me. Or I don’t have to buy any food” (Vit, after scrapping vouchers May 2002).

Vouchers, legally and illegally converted into money, were spent in various ways by various people. In the following part I discuss so-called 'voluntary payments', 'investments', and 'donations'.

8.4. Giving Charity from Vouchers?

Carrier claims that:

„We pay taxes in money, give charities in money, receive compensation in money, pay fines in money. These are very different sorts of transactions, yet money is the medium of exchange in all of them“(2001: 3).

The same applies to vouchers for refugees. But there is a significant element of such an exchange that differs from exchange with money. The voucher system is a device of double exchange: vouchers for money and money for goods, and it creates an **E-M-E** matrix. Exchanging vouchers for **M**oney either via dealings with *Indiáni* (until April 2002) or legally at the post office (after April 2002), that is used for another **E**xchange for buying goods and services. These transactions are not only more complex than for non-voucher holders but also ironical in a way that asylum seeker would not normally 'invest' money to pay taxes, bus fares or other fines. Asylum seekers are discredited from compensation with money. Hence there is a cautiousness over where and when money is spent.

I was a participant observer in certain moments when Roma asylum seekers gave charity to church or to homeless people. Vit, Honza and Olek were visiting me in Durham in early December 2002. Stereotypically I showed them (likely I do for any other visitor) the 'gold heart' of this town - Durham Cathedral. The Durham choir was practicing Christmas carols. On our way back, Vit contributed to a Durham Cathedral charity box with his spare change. At the parking place, two policemen gave them a fine because their parking ticket had already expired. Vit refused to give directly five pounds; instead he agreed to pay the fine later, which would in this case be worth forty pounds. I was put into the role of an interpreter, and I had to deal with this, according to Vit, 'entertaining situation'. Later, the policemen left us with a ticket fining Vit forty pounds.

"I will not pay this fine. I would never pay off my debts. I will sell this car...this car is not registered with me, anyway. I simply don't want to pay him straight because it'll firstly end up in his pocket. I think! Secondly I am not giving my savings for a stupid penalty. And thirdly I wouldn't sign anything if I don't understand. Even though I know you can translate that piece of paper for me perfectly" (Vit, December 2002).

One evening when I was returning from Newcastle to Durham, Jirka accompanied me to the train station. In front of the entrance hall a young homeless man was laying on his sleeping bag. Jirka threw a few pence in front of his feet. I was curious whether Jirka had ever supported homeless people in the same or another way before in the Czech Republic and in England. He explained that after his arrival he was on vouchers with an extra ten-pounds of cash (until April 2002). He was not able to spend as well as save some money.

Jirka did not even think about *"giving money just like that to someone who I do not know when I am not sure if I will be able to eat the next day"*.

Later he stressed that using vouchers exchangeable for money at the post office is significantly more convenient: *"I don't have to think too much if I can afford this or that, if this is for clothes or for milk, and I even have spare change in my pocket"* (Jirka January 2003).

Spur of the moment; I took my train to Durham later feeling annoyed with myself, because I was not enough aware of the difficulties to open discussion on money and vouchers.

Some Roma asylum seekers prefer to save money and occasionally send some to the Czech Republic:

"Once a month I send some money home, it is better to wait when I have more korunky and send it in one go. When we came we saved money to buy things we needed here in England. But now we have them. I know that people in Czech need money, so if I can I send some to my relatives.
(Mariana, January 2002)

Or they would invest their savings in cars:

"We say that he is not a real Rom if he has no car...It was like my grandparents who used to have a horse as their pride. We are trueborn Roma, and we are proud of that" (Vit and Honza, February 2002).

The question of savings from vouchers and bypassing paying fines and fares can distort the comprehension of asylum seekers' situations to a considerable degree. I am not sure if the consequential economic practices of Roma asylum seekers I have described are clear enough to understand. I am not certain if I can explain more deeply **HOW** it is possible that Roma asylum seekers are capable of savings, buying cars, TV sets, mobile phones, giving charities, supporting homeless people and rarely paying fines – everything from voucher support. Or for why, on top of their 'income' and profits from dealings, they sometimes claim extra money for children's' bus fares to schools from the social services. Or is not it unimportant to delve and trace the answers to questions of 'how' and 'why'? In the next paragraphs I explore the meaning of this 'natural' approach through debate on economic niches. I examine whether the refugee-ness or gypsy-ness make any difference in the 'asylum' life.

9. 'Gypsy-ness' and 'Refugee-ness': Economic Niches of Roma and Roma Asylum Seekers

The weaknesses of the voucher system were exposed and the loopholes were filled in by the inventiveness, creativity and credibility of the asylum seekers sooner than the government realised. Some Roma asylum seekers initiated manifold ways to cross the 'boundaries of forbiddances' and illicit measures of economic practices were discovered. This ability is not inherent in something that is 'Gypsy' *per se*. Nonetheless the vast bibliographies and literature⁴¹ on Gypsy economic niches and practices self-evidently demonstrate that it is a 'GYPSY WAY' to "make something from nothing; to be cunning and smart in economic practices; to live from dealings, trading and marketing without incorporating the outsiders, the *Gajo* - 'other' throughout reciprocal relations with them" (Stewart 1997b: 96).

⁴¹ For instance: Fraser (1995), Lemon (2000), Okely (1950), Stewart (1997), Acton and Mondy (1997).

“Through a rhetorical celebration of economic cunning they [Gypsies] present trade as a means to live ‘well’ and ‘lightly’ (*laches*) in the world. As Gypsies put it: ‘We make money turn around for us, turn around and come to us’. They do this by organising, persuading or manipulating others into doing business. The Gypsy’ role on the market is managing people.” (Stewart 1997a: 93).

I argue that inevitably, not only have Gypsies “been economically marginalized and have lived often in considerable poverty [ref. to Tomka 1984] they still continue to find economic and social niches in which to make a living and maintain their way of life, cultural identity and social distinctiveness” (Stewart 1997a: 84), but all others who live in severe welfare conditions, under the notion of political and economical pressure, attempt to preserve their lives and identities.

Neither the ‘Gypsy-ness’ nor the ‘Refugee-ness’ is the correct answer to the question: *How come they are still capable of finding keys to doors that the government deliberately and constantly lock up?* I understand this capability rather as an embodied repercussion of the governmental security measures into which asylum seekers are trapped. The discovery of channels for opportunities whilst waiting for the ticket ‘Leave to remain’ had converted into a boiling uproar. To give a clearer picture of the ‘push’ elements that Roma asylum seekers undertook for the sake of being freed from such a trap, I share some of their narratives.

My stepmother, with pride says:

“Who says that we Cigáni are dumb? We came with nothing - just plastic bags. And look around”! As Roma grows up, he is ^{taught} ~~thought~~ to survive, no matter what it costs. Moreover, a small Rom already speaks two languages. So, if people say that Cigáni are stupid – come to me and I will tell you who is stupid” (October 2002).

During this interview, our discussion centred mainly on the economic practices of asylum seekers characterized by their inventiveness and survival.

Vit joined her arguments:

"Come on, it doesn't mean that if you have a sticker of a refugee that you are brainwashed! Jana, you would be surprised how much we know and you don't. Simply you can't know because you don't live in this system, you are not a refugee here!" (October 2002)

My stepmother gave me some insights into her approach to life:

*"I live today, because I might not be here tomorrow. Money will be and we won't be. So, why not enjoy your life now? My great-grand parents, grandparents, and parents used to live like that. I do the same and I pray my children will continue in it. What would life be like without enjoyment!? We, Cigáni, will never die of hunger. My grandparents taught my parents to steal chickens, chicken eggs, and vegetables from the garden or farms in a small village they lived in, if we did not have anything to fill our mouth. Or we exchanged goods for goods. **Rom** will always find a way to survive, believe me, and **everybody** who has a harsh life with harsh conditions **too**"* (April 2002).

9.1. Whose' 'Economic Cunnings'?

A friend of mine, Bohdan, of Roma nationality from the Balkans came to the United Kingdom after the war in Former Yugoslavia. The war killed all his family, apart from his sister. The life in his country became a closed chapter once he decided to migrate. He was tempted by public opinion and by the media about the multiethnic and 'welcoming' atmosphere for those who seek their rights in England, and it is this that brought him here.

"You could hear everywhere outside England how this country is safe. It was a goal for most refugees. Moreover, here, you have a variety of other ethnic groups and you speak English, which is much easier if you make the decision – which Western country should I fly to". (October 2002)



He was claiming asylum for both political and economic reasons, and after six months of political procedures he was granted asylum. A few months later he obtained permanent residence. He started a university degree with income merely from the voucher support. Finally he applied for British citizenship. He was still living on social benefits and he earned some extra money as an interpreter of five different European languages. He had experienced direct contact with immigration officers, judges and asylum seekers, and as he says: *"I did not learn much more when I already had permanent stay. I know those stories of asylum seekers who I interpret for. These stories are – me"* (October 2002).

He was a refugee himself and he understood very well what it was like to be on vouchers. He tried to find several ways to 'survive' his refugee life.

*"We can sit here for days and talk about vouchers, about the cases I came across or the cases I experienced myself. But your hand will be tired and your brain will not believe soon....simply, **all the people** who are controlled by someone and by something will do all for not to be. It's a strange kind of torture. You are tied up but your hands are free. Well, so we use our hands and we use our brains too! No matter whom you are, but your will, your diligence, and a bit of luck matter."* (Bohdan, October 2002)

During my field research I had an opportunity to meet many Czech and Slovakian Roma, as well as other asylum seekers of different nationalities. They were Roma, non-Roma (Gádže), Muslims, Christians, and Hindus or were of other religious or ethnic backgrounds, but they all shared something in common: the status of an asylum seeker. My research project is purely centred on Czech-Slovak Roma asylum seekers; therefore I did not interview other groups of refugees. Nevertheless I used the opportunity to expand my curiosity as well as knowledge about the situation of other refugees. My ears were open to hear similar stories to that of my core group of informants: Czech-Slovak asylum seekers. To some degree, these discussions led me to expand my critique of literature (i.e. Okely [1930], Stewart [1977], Fraser [1995], Growe [1995]) that has been written on Gypsies/Roma, in particular on their 'economic practices', which are usually recognised as an inherent Roma cultural trait described as 'economic cunning'. I acknowledged the reality of asylum seekers (Roma or any other group) who are somewhat trapped in the bureaucracy of the asylum policy with the

perpetual question: *Will I be deported today?* This trap consists of their awareness of illegality together with an awareness of humanity.

These people are locked up in the *Rite of passage* with the sticker 'asylum seeker', shuttling along a continuum of anxiety and fear, and they are victims of persecuting governments. They must wait but at the same time they do not want to lose their time. They are **pulled** into the voucher system once they cross the state border as political migrants, and later the system **pushes** them into such activities and practices that easily create stereotypes and markers of 'economic' migrants. The push-pull elements are accompanied by distinguishing labels in the rite of passage in the United Kingdom.

10. What Would I Do if...?

I spent fourteen and a half months dipping in and out of the field, and I met several Roma asylum seeker families as well as asylum seekers from other countries like Iraq, Former Soviet Union and Former Yugoslavia, who create a part of the 'voucher system'. I learned a lot from their recounted stories and informal encounters, I acknowledged the difficulties they face, and I comprehended their *rite of passage* in England relating to their social, economic and cultural lives. I often compared their stories with my own stories of being a 'stranger' in England. My student status and position at the university in the UK put me a few steps higher in the hierarchy to those with the status of asylum seeker.

I have collected great material, yet, when I think about the economic practices, they become a puzzle for me. I simply cannot judge the asylum seekers' *rite of passage* in a bundle - generally. I presume that if I were to offer an overarching insight into the situation of the economic and cultural 'lives' of Czech and Slovak Roma asylum seekers in the United Kingdom, my work would be lacking in its originality and quality too. These rich stories are dearly appreciated and I put them, together with my field experience, into words and contextualize them with theory. Still this work is 'just' a collection of bits and pieces of the lived experiences of one (as opposed to another) relatively small group of asylum seekers from the former Czechoslovakia.

I do not wish to make a general overview, as I might end up with what is unpopularly called generalisation and stereotyping. It is important to point out that attitudes and opinions on vouchers, as well as on the life of a group of asylum seekers cannot be studied as a whole. It is complex, and it is potentially compromising to sum up the meanings of a particular thing 'X' on behalf of a complete group, because its individuals might perhaps perceive this thing as 'Y'. To disclose these diverse understandings of meanings was one goal in this thesis.

CHAPTER IV. :Conclusion



www.refugeecouncil.co.uk/2002

THIS is the heart-rending letter that Nikki Garzova, 13, wrote to Home Secretary, David Blunkett, in April this year, while the family were being held in Dungavel House Detention Centre, near Glasgow.

Wednesday 3rd April 2002

Room 409
Dungavel Detention
Strathaven
South Lanarkshire
ML10 6RF

A letter to Mr. David Blunkett

(The Home Office Secretary)

The Evening Chronicle, 24th October 2002

Dear Mr Blunkett,
I know that you are very busy and important person, but I am writing to you because my family is in a sad and bad situation.
My name is Nikola. I come from Slovakia. I am only 13, a little teenager. My birthday was on 2nd April. I spend it in detention centre. It's my second birthday in detention centre. About a year ago I spend my birthday in detention centre.
I lived in Gateshead. I liked it there. It was the bestest place I have ever been. I had lots of friends there. All my friends did not forget about me, I knew that because they send me lots of birthday cards.
My birthday was really sad, so is my family.
My mum and dad were worried about my little sister, called Vanesa. She is 21 months old. She can't sit, can't walk and talk. She can't really see through her eyes. She missed her hearing test. She is having health problems, but she is absolutely beautiful. In Gateshead there was a team of doctors and they helped with her health. Me and my family know that the team of doctors will continue and my little sister will be like a normal child.
My brother Adrian, his birthday is on 24th April, he will be 12 years old. I wish for my brother to spend his birthday in Gateshead with his friends. I want to ask you if you can help me with it. Please!
In this country is my family very happy. Can you please to don't send us back to our country.
Thank you very much that you read my letter and PLEASE don't forget about my family.
From

Nikola Garzova
Nikola Garzova

Incorporation or Repatriation?

1. Not Writing Culture but Reading it!

The story of the Czech and Slovakian Roma asylum seekers that I put into words in two major parts of this thesis (migration and economics) is not about the writing of 'culture' - *Roma*, the description of living conditions of a social group – *asylum seekers*, and the depiction of a location – *the Northeast of England*. Neither is it an attempt to write about the identity of these people. This story is rather about finding the meanings and understandings of 'asylum' life, which displays limitations and restrictions as well as creativeness and inventiveness. It discloses the life of people who are the active players in a refugee cycle which is complex to 'read' and complex to comprehend without biases and stereotyping. This cycle tells the story of a rite of passage in which asylum seekers go through various stages in order to find their 'belonging'. Through these stages they are risking the loss of their homes and friends in order to map their 'new happier' lives, reawaken old identities and create new ones.

I echo Frake who nicely describes people as culture-readers and culture-makers, and this also applies to the group of people I was studying.

"Culture is not simply a cognitive map that people acquire, in whole or in part, more or less accurately, and then learn to read. People are not just map-readers; they are map-makers. People are cast out into imperfectly charted, continually revised sketch maps. Culture does not provide a cognitive map, but rather a set of principles for map making and navigation. Different cultures are like different schools of navigation designed to cope with different terrains and seas" (Frake 1977: 6-7 cited in Spradley 1980:9).

Roma asylum seekers – active participants in a migratory process accumulating lived experience of being the 'other' (the aliens) - are like the navigators who read and make the map of their culture whilst learning how to swim in the sea. This sea is not meant to be the North Sea - the physical border that 'naturally' separates continental

Europe from the overseas United Kingdom. It is rather a polemic about the rite of passage – the one inherent in asylum seekers' lives – and their never-ending (travel) journeys.

2. Life is a Story in which We are Moving from One Place and Status to Another

The second chapter of this thesis starts with the quote '*God created the earth for people to go to and fro, not to stay in one place*'. We – all humans – move from one place to another. We go to and fro in various ways. People use bicycles as one of the fastest means of transport in overpopulated Hong Kong. Villagers in Nepal walk miles to buy food at the market. Tourists in metropolitan and historical 'tourist' cities, for instance Prague, Rome, Venice or Budapest admire the beauty of the city from the seats of tourist carriages. Roma people in some places (for instance in Romanian Banat, the Balkans or Appleby in England) still use horses and caravans on their special journeys to 'Gypsy' fairs or markets. Businessmen from Newcastle fly down to a meeting in London, and students in the Czech Republic usually hitchhike from the university to their homes in order to save some money. Illegal migrants are squeezed into the lorries or underneath the shuttles when going through the English channel from Calais to Dover. Legal asylum seekers or refugees from the Czech-Slovak lands either fly by plane or they choose a relatively longer journey of crossing the territorial borders by coach from Prague to London. What is important in every journey we choose is the immediate goal we wish to reach and the imaginary place we travel to.

Roma journeys from the former Czechoslovakia oscillate around one common goal: being granted asylum in their imagined world - the United Kingdom. In this world their image of 'Paradise' is transformed by their gloomier experiences as they go along in their asylum lives. As God created the earth to go to and fro, he also offered us two paths: one is the path of *Heaven* and the other is the path of *Hell*. The stories of Roma paths to their dreamed and imagined Heaven (Paradise) later converted into a hostile Hell. Acquiring experiences with local authorities, the social and cultural system accompanied by elements of humiliation pushed them onto the margin of society. Mentally they felt cocooned:

"Here I realised what I miss from home and the value of my country. And here I am desperately sitting in my living room, thinking where it is safe for us Cigáni? Is there a place on this earth where people would accept us as humans?" (Berta 2002)

Is there such a place? This work does not trace whether the Czech and Slovak Republics are safer for Roma or whether England is. Instead it examines **what** the elements that encode these people's ambiguous feelings of fear and courage are, and **how** they interpret these elements and the external forces in their lives.

3. The Football Pitch: State Power versus Asylum Power

This work examines the power relations of the state and of a group of Roma asylum seekers. Eric Wolf suggests that "power is an attribute of a person; it is the capability of a person to act" (1990 cited in Donnan and Wilson 2001: 155). This power is invisibly encoded somewhere at the back of the asylum seekers' and refugees minds as well as in the minds of the politicians. These power relations evoke for me a picture of a football match. On the pitch there are two groups of players who intensively compete and fight – the one represents the government and the other Roma asylum seekers. Both groups are *de facto* creators and inventors. The government, in particular the Home Office, produces state law and legalises asylum policy to control and restrict the opposition players - asylum seekers - who create and invent ways to elude state power. In April 2000 the Home Office scored by inventing the voucher scheme, whilst Roma asylum seekers paradoxically equalized the score after a few months by exchanging vouchers for money with another immigrant group – *Indiáni*. The following April vouchers were scrapped and replaced by exchangeable vouchers for money at the post office. The Home Office hit the Roma asylum goalpost but the goalkeeper caught the ball. These voucher' exchanges were in essence faster and made it easier to spend money here and to send some 'home' to the Czech and Slovak Republic, and they reduced the stigma effect. It was also easier to claim extra emergency vouchers when the initial ones were lost or stolen. However, they also cut down the economic networks and established business relationships between *Indiáni* and Roma asylum seekers and their social rapport became weak. Finally, the invention of the voucher plastic cards produced the last score of the Home Office – a kind of ID card with the photograph and

name of the asylum seeker and a personal ID number that made sure he received the right amount of money at the post office.

This thesis charts theory and practice encoded in the minds of Roma asylum seekers and emphasises economic and social interactions. It looks at the ways in which theory works in practice, and critically explores how the governmental restraints are understood and tackled in Roma asylum seekers' context and activities. Finding ways to circumvent these restraints is a significant part of this rather endless immigration 'game'. This work covers what I have learned from these practices and activities, which now make me wonder what will come next from both sides: the governing state in order to govern the migrants, and the governed migrants in order to govern the state.

4. Labelled Boundaries in a *Rite of Passage*, and Labelled Identities

A major attempt in this thesis was to disclose the social and cultural labelling capacity of Roma asylum seekers and its impact on identities. These people are labelled twice over. The first time is via vouchers that portray their social status – they are classed as migrants, asylum seekers, or refugees (often also placed outside the class, like 'untouchables' in Indian castes, under the label 'aliens'). The second label is the one that portrays their Roma ethnicity- the colour of their skin. These 'stickers' divulge their statuses. They live in the Diaspora, with the external forces of state hegemony there to keep the **United** Kingdom multicultural and multiethnic. To the contrary we have seen how they function to disperse propaganda. The experience of 'asylum' life results in fear and anxiety of being subject to racism and discrimination, with the everyday question of deportation figuring prominently in asylum seekers' minds.

This thesis illustrates my understanding of the power relations between the governing and governed, accompanied by a charting of the political, economical and social borders in which Roma asylum seekers are trapped. These borders represent hidden stigmas and labels that identify and separate Roma asylum seekers from the 'others' and vice versa. My discussion on nested boxes of identities and (self)-identification lies at the heart of this thesis. I came to the conclusion that there is certainly not a simple identity but a set of identities which individuals are either attributed or which they acquire for themselves.

Bloom (1990) expressed that “identities are not fixed or immutable but are accumulated over the course of a lifetime; they are a part of the process of creating psychological stability. Territorially based identities are just some of the myriad identities possesses by people” (cited in Guntram H. Herb and David H. Kaplan 1999: 1-2).

My understanding of identities is like divulging pieces of a Russian doll. Inside the biggest doll there is hidden a smaller doll, and inside the smaller one is the smallest doll. Each doll differs by its size, and it can differ by its colour too. Nevertheless all the various components make up the doll (and these parts encounter various identities). Without the smallest part, or any other, we would not be talking about a Russian doll. Van Gennep’s notion of *rite of passage* has been helpful in charting the Roma asylum seekers’ path and divulging (re)creation of identities. This passage is formed during their actual ‘asylum’ life. Here the first phase of the rite of passage – *separation* – starts in the asylum seeker’s home (separation from the majority in the Czech and Slovak lands). *Liminality* is a rich process of identity formation, and it overlaps during the whole passage. This passage is, nevertheless, usually never completed in the phase *incorporation*, but in contrary, a new phase emerges. Deported Roma asylum seekers enter the phase of *repatriation*. We have seen how Roma asylum seekers during this rite of passage create and maintain social and cultural rapport as well as an economic network shared with other Roma asylum seekers and *Indiáni*.

In this work it has been revealed that the story of migration is for some Roma asylum seekers more than a journey, whilst for others it is purely an adventure trip, which was decided upon by the of a throw ‘lucky stone’. After going through the channel and crossing territorial borders, these people appear in a vacuum of endless ‘non-physical’ borders. In order to be accepted as an asylum seeker the *political* border comes first. In order to be awarded a place in the breadline in the UK another *economic* hindrance stands in the path of asylum seekers, and after crossing the *social and cultural* boundaries, in terms of the relationships they form with ‘others’, they are given the green light. In the context of the ‘football match’ between the ‘aliens’ and the government, these borders create a puzzling grid mixed altogether.

During the process of border-crossing, Roma asylum seekers often lose their senses of belonging, nevertheless, they still maintain their senses of happiness and hope. This I discovered through the field research that this work is based on.

5. Why Anthropology?

This research project could be studied from the perspective of other disciplines such as history, politics, economics, geography or sociology to describe key elements of borders, migration and the voucher system. I have chosen anthropology as a discipline and fieldwork as a method not only to discuss these elements but also to understand them directly from the asylum seekers' perspectives. This anthropological study and my fieldwork experience allowed me, to some extent, to comprehend the 'asylum' life, which I tried to express and share in this thesis. It attempts to look deeper, behind the theories, and it gives insights of how the theory is created by 'outsiders' – the directors of the performance, and how 'insiders' – the actors, perform it.

This study is a collection of bits and pieces of the lived experiences of one relatively small group of asylum seekers from the former Czechoslovakia. As explained in the introduction, I had originally been interested in comparing either two groups of asylum seekers in the UK, or comparing asylum seekers and other immigrants already granted refugee status, for instance *Indiáni*. This would, however, have required a much longer fieldwork period. I do not abandon this idea, but leave it for my future research.

Whilst writing down notes from my diaries and putting the bits and pieces together I often put myself in my informants' position. Many times I questioned myself: ***Who knows what I would do if I were a refugee in the United Kingdom?*** Would I be tempted to open doors that the government deliberately closes in front of my nose? I may, perhaps, act in exactly the same way that my informants did, and I do not necessarily have to be a Roma woman.

6. Last words...

Perhaps, when I next come to the Northeast of England my stepfamily will welcome me into their house in Newcastle; we would sit round the table drinking Turkish coffee and talking... Their house could be empty or the door would not be opened by my stepmother but by somebody new to me. Or my stepmother would open the Czech restaurant that she was dreaming about together with my mother, or a shop similar to that of *Indiáni*. ...Possibly, my Saturday walk in the Durham market place would be enriched by the melody of that Romany woman accordion player, or right there in the market members of the anti-racist campaign supporting refugee rights would demonstrate, or the opposite radical BNP 'One Race – White Race' demonstration would be held. What is, however, important to stress is that all the actions and things that are produced as well as consumed by all people regardless of their colour, ethnicity or religion lies at the heart of multiculturalism. The United Kingdom is one example. I often wonder what England (and other countries) would be like without all these migrants that give the country its rich history and unique diversity.

I can only assume what the lives of Roma asylum seekers would be like, and for the 'host' community in England, once the Czech and Slovak Republics become part of the European Union (which will eliminate the right of asylum claim). Nevertheless, I am assured of one thing. I will miss my Roma and non-Roma asylum seekers and their radiating happiness in their severe lives. I will miss the place and certainly my stepfamily in Newcastle dearly.

The last words I want to say in this thesis deeply mirror the phase of *liminality* in **my** own rite of passage, enriched by field and learning experiences that I encountered during the last two academic years: Did I ever think that my own life was difficult and cruel? (Partially) knowing what the 'asylum' life surrounded by everyday thoughts of deportation is like, I must confide that this research inspired in me a personal change - it made me feel much more humble and it changed my personal values and sets of priorities.

SUMMARY

ZÁVĚR

Cílem této postgraduální teze bylo nastínit život českých a slovenských Rómů v 'azylu' ve Velké Británii. Terénní výzkum byl proveden v severovýchodní části Anglie (v oblastech Middlesbrough, Newcastle, Gateshead a Teesside) od října roku 2001 do konce ledna 2003. Stěžejním bodem výzkumu bylo zjišťování a prozkoumávání různých identit jedince a jeho pocitu 'někam' patřit. Během let 1997 a 1998 fundamentální migrační vlny pod názvem „Rómský exodus“ z České a Slovenské republiky především do Velké Británie a Kanady dramaticky vzrostly. Rómové hledali cestu 'osvobození' od diskriminačních faktorů, které podle mnohých tzv. západní svět nemá, a na základě toho se mnoha z nich rozhodla podniknout cestu do Anglie s nálepkou 'politický žadatel o azyl'. Počet uprchlíků a azylantů ze Střední a Východní Evropy do Velké Británie giganticky vzrostl, a proto se britská vláda rozhodla podniknout vážná opatření v azylové politice, aby se Spojené království vyhnulo ekonomickým migrantům.

Ironicky, většina Rómů na základě bohatých zkušeností nastrádaných během života v azylu později vnímali Británii nikoliv jako zemi s humanitární pomocí pro uprchlíky bez jakýchkoliv náznaků diskriminace a rasismu, ale naopak jako zemi pronásledující a odmítající uprchlíky. Imaginární *ráj* vytvořený v podvědomí mnoha Rómů před příjezdem do Anglie se transformoval do představ *pekla*. Zkušenosti z procesu migrace a života Rómů v azylu se staly význačným bodem uvědomění si svého kulturního dědictví, vytváření a formování identit.

Tato teze osciluje kolem otázek týkajících se života lidí, kteří jsou subjektem odmítání a ponižování jak kulturně z hlediska rómské etnicity, tak i sociálně jako žadatelé o azyl mající vytetováno na čele 'odlišný'. Tento výzkum se opírá o dvě hlavní sub-disciplíny (antropologie migrace a ekonomická antropologie) ve dvou stěžejních kapitolách. Zde autorka diskutuje o procesu překračování teritoriálních hranic a jiných 'neviditelných' hranic a o vytváření sítě sociálních, kulturních a ekonomických vztahů prostřednictvím voucherů (kupních lístků) s „*Indiáni*“ (vlastníků drobných obchodů v Anglii, kteří jsou imigranty z Indie a Pákistánu). Hlavní důraz je kladen na pochopení toho jak teoreticky dané britské imigrační a azylové zákony a zákazy fungují v praxi jež

směřují k vynalézavosti a kreativitě rómských žadatelů o azyl za účelem se těmito zákonům vyhnout. Tato teze popisuje tzv. *Rite of passage* (přechod z jedné fáze-cesty do druhé) rómských žadatelů o azyl. Tento proces tvoří široké spektrum dalších procesů a pocitů: ponižování, odcizení, diskriminace, strachu a obav z nekonečných deportací produkující a formující identity lišící se od jedince k jedinci, od jedné skupině ke druhé. Tato práce poukazuje právě na to, že přisuzování různých identit k jedincům a ke skupinám produkuje falešné stereotypy a předsudky.

RESUME

Le but de ce travail est l'étude de la vie des gens du voyage (Roma) originaires de l'ex-république de Tchécoslovaquie et résidents réfugiés au Nord-est de l'Angleterre (Middlesbrough, Newcastle, Gateshead, Teeside). Les recherches ont été conduites pendant la période 2001-2003, à propos de la formation de l'identité et du sens d'appartenance. Pendant le dit exode Roma, vague fondamentale de migration, entre 1997 et 1998 principalement vers le Royaume Uni et la Canada, le nombre de demandeurs d'asile Roma augmenta dramatiquement. Les gens du voyages cherchaient par tous les moyens à échapper à la discrimination dont ils souffraient en Tchéquie et en Slovaquie et saisirent donc l'opportunité offerte par un Occident « accueillant » en revendiquant le statut de demandeur d'asile politique.

Le nombre croissant de demandeur d'asile en Angleterre, provenant de l'Europe centrale devint un vrai problème et les restrictions gouvernementales en matière de politique d'asile ne tardèrent pas à être imposées.

Ironiquement, le riche expérience des gens du voyage au Royaume Uni a provoqué un changement drastique de perception. Le pays initialement perçu comme accueillant devint un pays rejetant. Ce qu'ils pensaient être un paradis résidant au cœur des îles Britanniques devint en fait un enfer. Leur migration évolua pour finalement devenir une expérience transformatrice qui leur permit de réaliser et fonder leur identité.

Ce travail oscille entre les différents moyens d'acquérir un sens d'appartenance. C'est une étude à propos d'une diaspora, de gens considérés comme étrangers (outsider, alien), sujets à une rejection et à une humiliation culturelles, parce que ethniquement gens du voyage et sociales parce que demandeurs d'asile.

Le mémoire est divisé en deux majeures parties. La première discute des migrations, du processus de traversée des frontières, fussent-elles territoriales ou bien invisibles, ainsi que la création de réseaux sociaux et économiques avec les « Indiani ». La seconde partie débat des activités économiques, de la manière dont fonctionnent les restrictions théoriques, légalisées à travers la politique d'asile du gouvernement Britannique, au jour le jour pour les demandeurs d'asile et leurs manières d'éviter les contrôles. Ces conflits de pouvoir mettent en évidence la créativité, l'inventivité et surtout le combat des demandeurs d'asile Roma.

Ce mémoire reflète donc un rite de passage des demandeur d'asile Roma, accompagnée par un processus d'aliénation, humiliation, discrimination latente et menaces d'expulsion, dans lequel ils produisent une identité qui varie d'un individu à l'autre. La tentative de caractérisation du groupe par une identité unique produit des stéréotypes qui sont mis à jour dans ce travail.

GLOSARRY

Terms and abbreviations that are used in the text, and only words and expressions which have been used more than once in the text are included.

BNP – British National Party

Cigáni – Ethnic Gypsies

ERRC – European Roma Rights Centre

EU – European Union

Gádže – (Gadje) non-Roma and Whites

Indiáni – Ethnic Indians from the South of Asia

Korunky – (small Czech coins) equivalent to British pence

NASS – National Asylum Service Support

NGO – Non-profit non-governmental Organization

RC – Refugee Council

ROI – Romská občanská iniciativa (Roma Civic Initiatives)

TES – Traveller Education Service

UNHCR – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Známosti – (connections) in the context of networks

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX I. Vouchers

(Resources: www.bbc.co.uk/news and vouchers obtained from Roma asylum seekers)

Voucher Support via Plastic ID Cards:

Identification of Asylum Seekers and Refugees



http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/1624816.stm



http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/2084860.stm



Second type of vouchers issued after April 2002
Resource: obtained from Roma asylum seekers.

APPENDIX II.
Photo Gallery – Social Events 2001 - 2003

(Refugee Week [June 2002], Christmas and Saint Nicholas Day [2002], Rehearsal of the Roma group in Newcastle [2002])



How to find us

By Rail . . . Rheged is less than 5 minutes drive from Penrith Railway Station which is located on the West Coast main line.

By Road . . . The easiest approach is from Junction 40 (Penrith) off the M6 motorway. Rheged is just two minutes on the A66 towards Keswick (Parking is free).

By Bus . . . Catch X4 or X5 for Rheged. These services run from Penrith to Workington via Keswick.

Meals and Light refreshments

Christmas Fair

In aid of The British Red Cross - Cumbria Branch



Wednesday 13th November

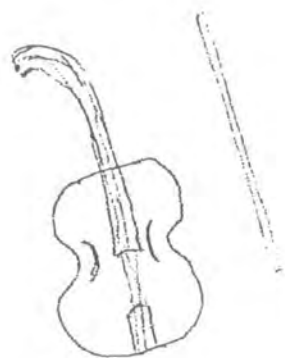
10.00am - 4.00pm

Rheged Visitors' Centre - Penrith

(A66 Keswick Road, near M6 junction 40)

Entry by Donation

Registered Charity Number 220949



Mikuláš



Pátek 6th prosince
Park St ulice Komunitni centrum,
Cruddas Park, Elswick

Od 6 : 00 hodin do 9 : 00 večer

Rómske písně

občerstvení

Každé dítě které přijde může zaspívat nějakou
píseň,

Děkujeme Vám za Vaši účast a doufáme, že se
sejdeme ve velkém počtu.

Free Zdarma





Saint Nicholas Day 6th December 2002
Elswick, Newcastle-Upon-Tyne



Roma Day (2002) and Refugee Week (2003)

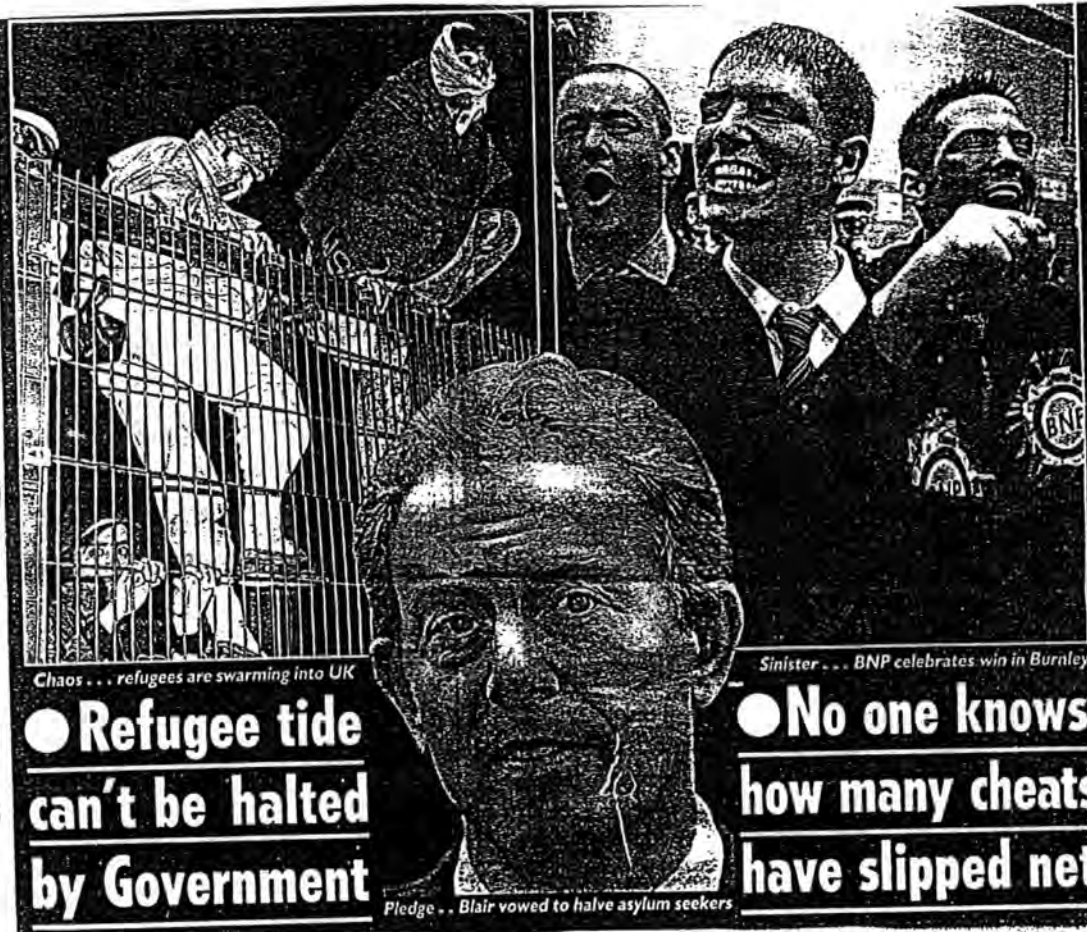
APPENDIX III.

Newspaper Articles

(Resources: The Sun, The Independent, The Sunday Times, The Observer, BBC News)

OFFICIAL ASYLUM TEARING UK APART

SHAMBLES!



Chaos... refugees are swarming into UK

● **Refugee tide can't be halted by Government**

Pledge... Blair vowed to halve asylum seekers

Sinister... BNP celebrates win in Burnley

● **No one knows how many cheats have slipped net**

BRITAIN'S asylum system is today revealed as a total SHAMBLES from top to bottom.

A shock report by MPs shows bogus refugees are flooding into the country.

Yet the Government seems unable to deal with the growing crisis.

The report by the all-party Home Affairs Select Committee also reveals that:

THE number of asylum-seekers arriving on our shores has soared from 4,223 in 1982 to 110,700 last year.

THE Home Office has no idea how many who have been refused asylum have stayed and slipped into the population.

GANGS of traffickers have grabbed control of the immigration system.

PROMISES made by ministers to eject thousands of fake refugees are impossible to keep, and

OUR benefits system makes Britain a magnet for cheats.

The study by the Labour-dominated committee - published days after the racist British National Party gained footholds in several town halls - also warned the prob-



BY **NIC CECIL**
POLITICAL CORRESPONDENT

lem could lead to extreme politics. The MPs fear "social unrest" could erupt across the land unless solutions are found by the Government.

They demanded the immediate removal of cheats, saying they should be locked up prior to deportation if they are likely to go on the run or are seen as a criminal threat.

They called for deals with other countries so bogus refugees can be easily repatriated.

Deepen

And they warned PM Tony Blair the crisis will deepen until the public sees that cheats are being turfed out.

Liberals who refuse to acknowledge the scale of the problem were accused of sticking their heads in the sand.

The report calls the rising number of asylum-seekers "clearly unsustainable".

The MPs declared: "If allowed to continue unchecked, it could overwhelm capacity to cope, leading inevitably to social unrest. It's evident the efficient removal of asylum-seekers whose claims have failed is a pre-condition for the credibility of the entire asylum process."

The MPs blasted the Home Office's inability to say how many cheats have slipped the net.

Their report said: "It's very difficult to address the problem effectively in the absence of reliable statistics."

"It's not satisfactory that the Government is unable to offer even a rough estimate of the number of failed asylum-seekers remaining in the UK."

"It is difficult to know the extent of the problems caused by absconding. It is unacceptable the Home Office simply does not know what proportion of failed asylum seekers abscond."

The report confirms suspicions that the BNP's recent local election victories were down to the Government's failure to control immigration.

It says: "There are signs this may already be happening. It will lead to a growing political backlash which will in turn lead to the election of extremist parties with extreme solutions."

Mr Blair vowed in February to halve the number of asylum-seekers by September.

And ministers have pledged to kick out 30,000 cheats every year. But the MPs said their promise only served to raise false expectations among voters.

The report says: "We deplore the setting of wholly unrealistic targets."

"They can only prove demoralising for all concerned. We are at a loss to understand the basis for the belief this target was achievable."

The alert over our inviting benefits system was sounded by Rexxar Ghafar, of Oxfordshire social services.

Exploit

The expert told the MPs: "The welfare system does encourage many economic migrants to exploit the weaknesses in the system under the name of 'asylum seekers'."

"This understandably creates resentment amongst the population."

On the villains trafficking asylum-seekers, the committee said: "It cannot be right to leave migration in the hands of criminal gangs, as to a large extent it is at the moment."

"Nor can it be right to admit only those who can afford to pay the large sums

demand by traffickers." The MPs said the key to tackling mass illegal immigration was a robust but humane deportation system.

And they demanded a £20million scheme to reinstate port controls to count migrants going in and out of Britain.

The committee welcomed recent signs that fewer bogus refugees are heading here.

Home Secretary David Blunkett will publish the latest migrant figures in a fortnight.

Home Office minister Beverley Hughes welcomed some parts of the report last night.

She said: "I am pleased the committee has recognised the importance of the removal of those with no right to be here to an effective immigration policy, and the appropriate use of detention to support that."

NEARLY 250,000 non-EU immigrants will enter Britain every year, the Independent think-tank Migration Watch UK predicts.

It said official statistics fail to estimate those who sneak in and visitors who over-stay.

It added: "The Home Office view appears to be that, since they cannot be counted, they should be ignored."

It's easy: a few forms. a tired nod

INSIGHT

How to exploit the system

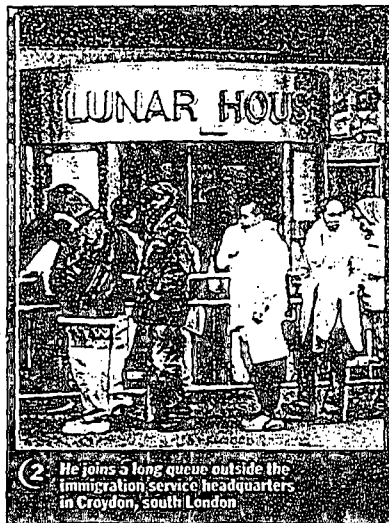
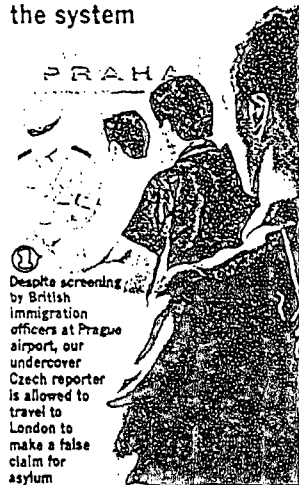
LAST Sunday morning David Pesta, a young man from the Czech Republic, walked into Prague airport ready to invade Britain.

Armed with little more than a passport and a ticket to Heathrow costing just over £200, his aim was to test the systems supposed to deal with the record numbers of migrants flowing into Britain.

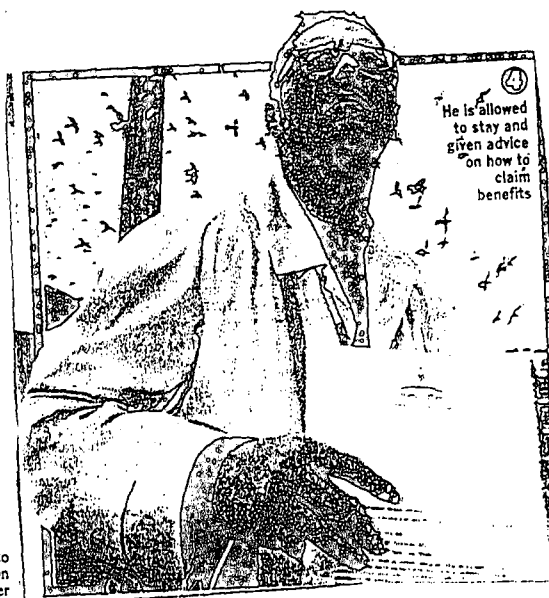
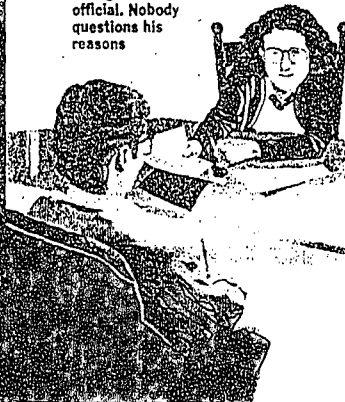
The first hurdle was at the airport where advance posts of British immigration officers operate. They were installed after the number of asylum seekers from the Czech Republic — soon to join the European Union — tripled in five years. Sure enough, the officers stopped Pesta to ask why he wanted to travel to Britain.

"For a holiday," said Pesta, a 24-year-old journalist working for The Sunday Times. Well-dressed and sporting designer spectacles, he fits the profile of the apparently disingenuous eastern European asylum seeker the authorities are looking to turn away.

But the queues were long and time pressing. After some further questions he was given a slip that would speed his passage through Heathrow. By the afternoon he was in London



③ The reporter makes his claim for asylum in a 15-minute interview with an immigration official. Nobody questions his reasons



and ready to claim asylum.

At 8am the following day he arrived at Lunar House, headquarters of the immigration service in Croydon. A line of men, women and children already snaked 300 yards down the side of the building, white, black and oriental faces, their

breath frosting in the chill air.

By mid-morning Pesta was inside the building, where security men asked him to empty his pockets. A few pound coins rattled onto the desk. "You're a rich man," said the guard.

A woman gave him a card numbered 392 and he entered a

room packed with people from many countries — Poles, Iraqis, Afghans and, he noticed, a Russian family of four accompanied by a lawyer who appeared drunk despite the early hour.

On one side was a row of more than 20 glass screens but only a dozen officers were pro-

cessing the applicants. Another two hours passed before Pesta was called for interview. The officer asked if Pesta needed a translator. He declined.

Name? asked the officer. Date of birth? Address? Soon the appraisal was over. "How strange," thought Pesta, "he

didn't even ask why I wanted to claim asylum." Then he was on to another queue, with another ticket, this time for fingerprinting. This room was so full people were fighting over seats and the air was thick with the sound of babies crying. Finally Pesta's name was called at

3.30pm. By now everyone's tempers were frayed and a female immigration officer was shouting at a woman from Algeria who was reduced to tears.

Just after 8pm — 12 hours after he had arrived — Pesta was summoned to explain why he wanted to claim asylum. He muttered about "racial problems" at home. No one seemed very interested. It was late. No ID card was ready for him. Come back in two weeks, said the officer, sending him on his way with various sheets of information. They told Pesta he was entitled to free medical care and free legal advice.

As he left, he saw more asylum seekers outside arranging their sleeping bags, to be first in the queue the next day.

Pesta returned to a friend's flat but he had told officials he could stay there only one more night. They had advised him to contact Migrant Helpline for further assistance.

The next day he was interviewed at its London office and offered help including free accommodation and food. He was told that after...

"You can do it right now if you are going into emergency accommodation," said the advice worker. "It will be done within 48 hours."

Within 40 hours of leaving Prague, Pesta was in Britain, in the asylum system and, potentially, free to battle through the legal system or to disappear if he chose. And this is a man who has a home, a job and a normal life in a country eligible to join Britain in the EU.

While the system is open to abuse by people such as Pesta, it does not necessarily help deserving cases. Frehiwot Bahia, for example, claimed to have been attacked, jailed, beaten and raped in Ethiopia because of her mother's Eritrean origins. Her claim for asylum, was rejected on a technicality because certain papers were not lodged in time.

"This is a classic case where the Home Office has preferred to use regulations and red tape to refuse my client," said George Brendon, her legal adviser.

The combination of asylum seekers and illegal immigrants has been rising, just as legal immigration reaches record levels. Analysis by The Sunday Times reveals that in the past five years net immigration to the UK has reached 830,000 — double the previous five years. In a decade migration has added about 1.2m people — more than the population of Manchester.

Up to a third of the new immigrants are now asylum seekers — they numbered more than 71,000 last year alone. And the sheer volume of asylum claims has spawned a virtual industry of bureaucrats, lawyers and charities dubbed "Asylum Inc".

The total cost of dealing with asylum seekers has risen steadily

to more than £1.8 billion last year. The lion's share of this bill was paid by the Home Office, which officially estimated the cost of housing and caring for asylum seekers at £1.05 billion. It paid a further estimated £415m just on dealing with asylum claims at the immigration department. Another £100m was spent on legal aid for lawyers working on asylum cases, and an estimated £35m on asylum cases at the immigration appeals service.

Excluding Home Office grants, voluntary groups spent nearly £100m of public money on refugees and asylum seekers, including £18m spent by the national lottery and grants from the EU. In addition, £45m was spent on sending asylum seekers' children to school and about £50m on holding asylum seekers at prisons and detention centres. These figures alone add up to about £1.8 billion, and exclude the cost of asylum seekers to the NHS, or the cost of asylum cases in the appeal courts and the House of Lords.

Lawyers are among those

4 Within 40 hours of leaving Prague, Pesta was in Britain, in the asylum system and free to disappear

law firms are expected to be paid more than £1m each this year under contracts to handle immigration and asylum cases with the Legal Services Commission, which administers legal aid. The largest contract, worth more than £5m, is with Howe & Co, a three-partner firm in west London.

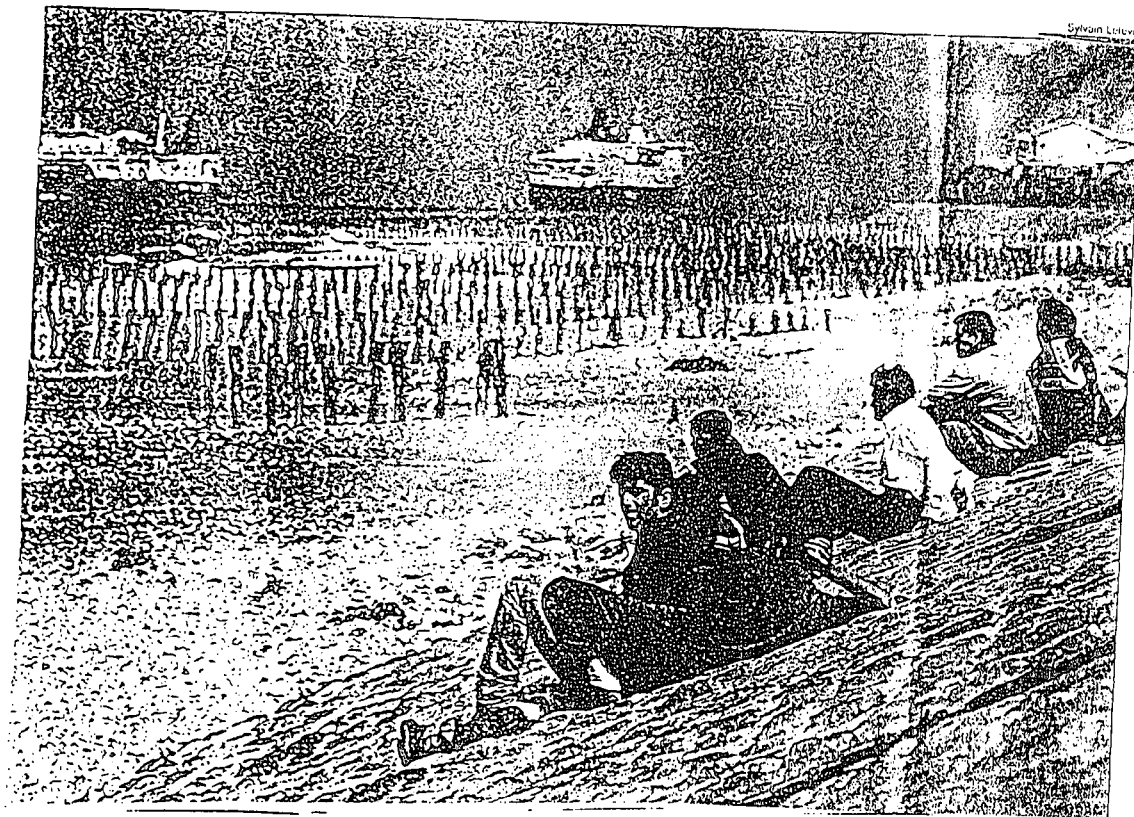
Steve Orchard, chief executive of the Legal Services Commission, said the legal aid bill for asylum cases was still rising. "We are not at a peak yet. The figure could go even higher," he said.

Migrant Helpline receives £13m under a Home Office grant to assist asylum seekers at three "induction centres" in Dover, Folkestone and Margate and at "one-stop shops" throughout the UK. Nick Burchell, who runs the Dover induction centre, said: "They are told the government can help them, feed them, give them a roof, educate their children, teach them new professions and languages."

Critics believe this provides one explanation for the general rise in asylum applications, up threefold in the past 10 years. Others believe that, in its enthusiasm to "get tough" on asylum, the Home Office has helped to waste even more money.

Saidi Sheikh, an immigration

and you beat the asylum barrier



Watching and waiting: refugees from the soon-to-close Sangatte camp. They know that if they get to Britain, the French will refuse to take them back

lawyer and consultant to the Legal Services Commission, said about half the money spent on legal aid could be saved if the Home Office made good decisions. "Vast amounts are being spent on appeals of which many are successful," he said.

David Blunkett, the home secretary, has promised to reform the "asylum industry". He believes it is "absolutely crazy" that the message has got out that "if you get here and claim asylum we will support you".

His Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Bill, which will complete its journey through parliament in a week, will

deal with exactly the sort of asylum seeker as our reporter from the Czech Republic.

Under the bill, instead of placing asylum seekers on benefits and dispersing them to inner cities, they should be held in rural "accommodation centres".

He will create a "white list" of at least 10 countries, so far comprising the EU candidate countries, including the Czech Republic, from where applicants will be presumed to be not genuine. Their right of appeal will also not prevent them being deported in the meantime.

State benefits, the bill says,

will be refused to many of the 10,000 people who apply for asylum after already entering Britain, half of them after queuing up in Croydon.

Last week, key parts of Blunkett's proposals were at risk after the Lords voted amendments that restricted the right to hold asylum seekers in the new accommodation centres.

Even if all Blunkett's measures become law, many believe the asylum system is so overwhelmed that these measures will be hard to implement.

Many asylum seekers simply disappear when their claim is refused. Immigration officers do

believe there are at least 100,000 remaining, possibly more than a quarter of a million.

Britain must persuade other countries to accept asylum seekers back. The French government still has no plans to take back asylum seekers, despite agreeing to close the Sangatte Red Cross camp near Calais.

The task of trying to resolve these contradictions lies with Beverley Hughes, the immigration minister. She points out that the government's asylum bill is trying to open up legal ways for people to come to Britain to take up work.

Some economists say that a

declining birthrate and ageing population mean Britain needs more young workers from abroad. Home Office research has suggested migrants make an annual net contribution to the economy of £2.5 billion.

However, Harriet Sergeant, author of a study on immigration for the Centre for Policy Studies, argues that most immigrants move to London and the southeast. "This region is already suffering overcrowding. Hospitals, schools, housing, roads, transport and the countryside cannot cope; we simply don't have the space for mass immigration," she said.

● Black Britons twice as likely to be unemployed as whites

● Asian families suffer from double the rate of ill-health

● Third-generation immigrants remain among most deprived

Britain today: A nation still failing its ethnic minorities

BY MAXINE FUTH
Social Affairs Correspondent

A DISTURBING picture of the huge gulf in health, wealth and unemployment between white Britain and ethnic minorities was revealed yesterday.

Figures from the 2001 national census show that, while England is becoming more multicultural, second and even third-generation immigrants are still among the most deprived in society.

The figures show black, Asian and other ethnic minorities are twice as likely to be unemployed, half as likely to own their home and run double the risk of poor health, compared with white Britons.

They also show the proportion of Muslim children living in overcrowded accommodation is more than three times the national average, that they are twice as likely to live in a house with no central heating and children from Pakistani and Bangladeshi families suffer twice as much ill-health as their white counterparts.

Data from the census has given the most detailed picture of Britain's ethnic make-up. The census form allowed people to describe themselves as mixed race, rather than having to choose white, Asian, black or Chinese ethnicity, while more questions than ever were asked about people's homes, family set-up and overall health.

The data undermines the belief that first-generation immigrants may suffer but their subsequent, British-born offspring move off the headline. Instead, the results prove the gap between the richest and poorest in Britain has never been wider.

Just 4.5 per cent of white



People from black and Asian communities are still among the most deprived in British society, the 2001 census reveals

from ethnic minorities are moving up and becoming wealthier, but for some children the future is bleak. They are getting the worst start in life and the problem becomes a vicious circle because of the correlation between poor housing, poor education and future criminality.

Part of the problem, ac-

Black men aged 16 to 74 are unemployed, compared with 9.1 per cent of Pakistani men, 10.2 per cent of Bangladeshi and 10.4 per cent of black men. While more than 80 per cent of people of mixed race were born in Britain, the unemployment rate among those aged 16 to 24 in that ethnic group is

more than double that of their white counterparts.

More than a quarter of mixed race people aged 16 to 24 have no qualifications, compared with one in eight white British people of the same age. And more than two thirds of white Britons live in owner-occupied homes, compared

with a quarter of Pakistanis.

People from ethnic minorities are in poorer health: a third of Bangladeshi men and more than a quarter of Pakistani men aged between 50 and 64 say their health is "not good", compared with less than one in 10 white Britons.

Adam Sampson, the director

of the homeless charity Shelter said. "Coming at a time when the British National Party has been winning large electoral gains on the back of their claims black people are coming over here and taking our houses, the census data gives us a true picture of what is really happening. People from ethnic

minorities experience worse housing problems than other people and are more likely to be in overcrowded, unfit homes."

He added: "Overcrowded housing has been linked to respiratory illness, infectious diseases, mental health problems, disruption at school and other problems. Some people

live in a situation that is not fit for the larger social housing stock in the country has been sold leaving only smaller one or two bedroom homes. Mr Sampson said: "People from ethnic minorities are being given homes that are simply not big enough to house their often larger families. If they do buy their own houses, they can't afford enough rooms and so while on paper it may look as if they are affluent owner-occupiers in stable housing, the reality is very different."

Mr McLeod of the Centre for Research in Ethnic Relations at Warwick University said: "The deprivation suffered by ethnic minorities is a major problem and has disturbing consequences. In some parts of Britain, those consequences are already manifesting themselves in the rising rate of gun crime in some areas."

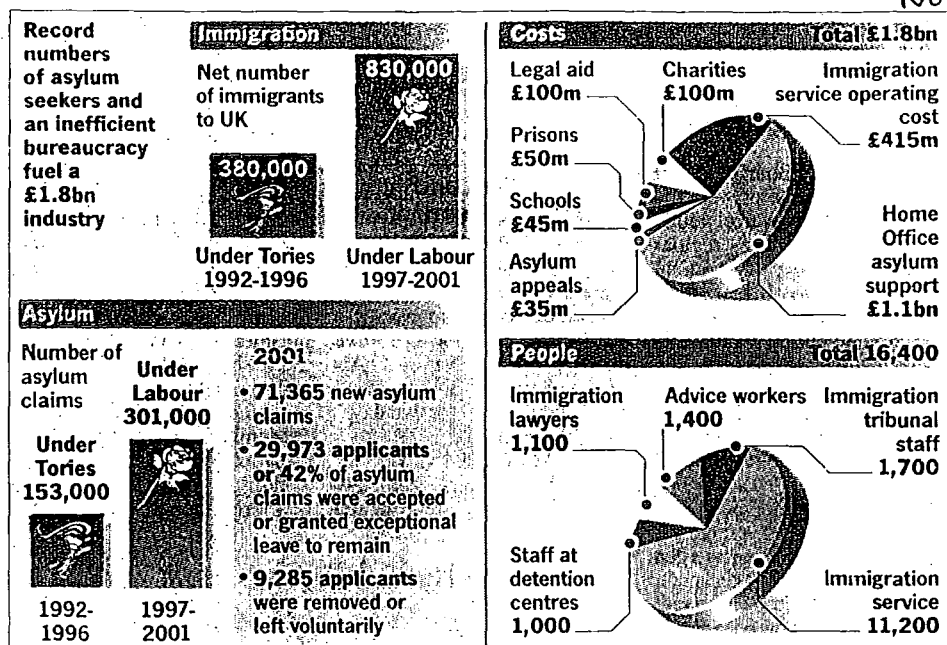
The Government has set up these programmes for tackling poverty and inequality, but in some places they simply do not seem to be working, and we are seeing domination after generation grow up in deprivation."

The census also looks at the way people describe themselves as mixed race and under 16, the ethnic grouping is now the fourth largest in England.

While the majority of people (77 per cent) describe themselves as Christian, it is also an elderly congregation compared with other religions. The proportion of people calling themselves Christian is lowest in the 16 to 24 age group, at less than two thirds. But the same age band boasted the highest proportion of Muslims, 5 per cent. Even 90-year-olds share care burden, page 6

Queen Humphreys P

The Sunday Times
Nov 3, 2002



Figures that bolster UK's reputation as soft touch

BRITAIN is one of the easiest countries in Europe in which to claim asylum and the chances of remaining, once an application has been made, are much higher.

Last week an undercover reporter was able to lodge an asylum claim in London in 15 minutes, giving him access to housing, free NHS care and benefits worth £37 a week.

In France, by comparison, it can take up to 10 months to lodge a claim and until then asylum seekers must rely on charity or their own initiative to live.

Over the past decade, Britain has overtaken Germany, Sweden, America and Canada in receiving asylum applications. Many see Britain as a "soft touch".

Last year, Britain received 71,365 applications, a figure that rose to 88,300 once dependants were included, more than any other industrialised country. In 1992, the total was 32,300.

Stephen Grey

In most European countries there has been a much smaller rise in applications over the past 10 years and in those which have introduced strict immigration controls, the numbers have fallen.

In Germany in 1992 more than 430,000 people claimed asylum, but last year this dropped to 88,290, including dependants, after a change in the law in 1993 which meant that anyone who had travelled through a "safe" third country — including every country bordering Germany — was barred from claiming.

Sweden also clamped down on eligibility and the numbers fell from 84,020 in 1992 to 24,550 last year.

Government statistics show asylum seekers also have a greater chance of remaining once a claim has been lodged. In 2001, 42% of applicants were granted asylum or were

allowed to stay on humanitarian grounds, compared with 17% in France, 23% in Austria and 27% in Germany.

Britain also deports fewer failed asylum applicants than most major European countries, despite having more applicants. Last year 9,285 were taken from Britain compared with up to 15,000 from Germany, 16,000 from Holland and 11,000 from Italy. France removed 9,000, slightly fewer than Britain.

Although Germany has cut benefits to asylum seekers to just £25 a month, Britain, which pays claimants £150 a month, is not particularly generous. In France, asylum seekers get a one-off payment of £190 once they register and a monthly allowance of £150.

The one area in which Britain appears harsher is its provisions for detaining arrivals. In most European countries, this is possible for one or two months, but in Britain indefinite detention is permitted.

Controversial Lottery grant means anti-deportation group will open Tyneside office

By STEVE KENNEDY

AN asylum seekers' group is pressing ahead with plans to open an office on Tyneside after being allowed to keep a controversial £340,000 National Lottery grant.

Lottery bosses sparked outrage when its Community Fund branch handed the money to the National coalition of Anti-deportation Campaigns (NCADC).

The group, which fights for asylum seekers not to be deported, said it would use the money to set up a base in the North East where more than 5,000 new arrivals have been dispersed.

But Home Secretary David Blunkett, furious at the group was involved in campaigns including a fight to free Palestinian terrorist Yassin al-Braiki, ordered an urgent view of the grant.

Now the Community Fund has said the NCADC can keep the cash providing it tones down its aggressive campaigning on its website.

It means it can now press ahead with plans to open an office in Newcastle or North Tyneside to support asylum seekers. And it will continue its campaign for the release of Jawed

Asylum group to set up base in North East



CONTROVERSY — left: Home Secretary David Blunkett and, right: terrorist Jawed Botmeh

Botmeh, who was sent to the high-security Frankland Prison in Co Durham after being convicted of conspiring to bomb the Israeli embassy in London in 1996.

NCADC chairman Omari Mtiga said today: "Nearly all new asylum seekers are being dispersed to the North East and Scotland, where resources are limited. The grant will enable us to open and staff a new office in the North East."

NCADC vice-chairman Pete Widlinski said: "While we never doubted the Community Fund would make the grant, we find it unacceptable that staff and trustees of the fund and our own workers have been subjected to a sustained campaign of misrepresentation, race hate and threats."

"We hope this difficult period is now at an end and that we can again concentrate on our role of giving advice and support to those campaigning against deportation."

"The allegation that we encourage criminal activities has been proven to be completely unfounded."

The group hopes to set up an office within months and the Chronicle understands officials have already looked at sites in Newcastle and North Shields.

Community Fund chairman Lady Diana Brittan said there had been "legitimate concerns" about the NCADC's activities but recognised it did "valuable work" with individual asylum seekers.

steve.kennedy@ncjme-dia.co.uk

Gypsies lose High Court asylum bid

A LEGAL challenge to Britain's ban on Czech gypsies failed yesterday. A High Court judge ruled that ministers had not acted unlawfully by introducing measures to stop Roma gypsies from entering the UK in case they might seek asylum. Campaign group Liberty, acting for the European Roma Rights Centre and six anonymous gypsies, had argued that British immigration controls at Prague Airport broke international law and discriminated against the Roma. But Mr Justice Burton, sitting in London, rejected the challenge, saying the pre-clearance system was "no more or less objectionable" than a visa control system. Last month, 48 Roma gypsies were deported back to the Czech Republic from Stansted Airport.

Gifted refugee girl sent back to Slovakia

By Sophie Goodchild
Home Affairs Correspondent

The Home Office has deported a gifted teenage asylum-seeker despite promises by the Home Secretary, David Blunkett, to reconsider her case.

A refugee campaigner accused the Government of focusing on "soft targets" after the removal of Nikola Garzova and her family, who fled from Slovakia to escape persecution by neo-Nazis.

The Home Secretary said earlier this year that the family's application would be treated "fairly, properly and impartially" after Nikola made a direct appeal to be allowed to stay in Britain; her plight was highlighted by the *Independent on Sunday* in May.

However, immigration officials arrived at the family's home without warning last week, handcuffed Nikola's father, Dusan, and put the family on an aircraft bound for Slovakia.

Nikola arrived in Britain two years ago speaking no English, but within six months had been promoted from the bottom to the top stream at school and placed on a special register for gifted and talented pupils. In September 2001, she enrolled at Thomas Hepburn Community Secondary School in Gateshead, where teachers described her as a gifted pupil.

The family had been receiving treatment for Nikola's sister Vanesa, who was recently diagnosed with cere-

bral palsy. The child was born prematurely after her mother, Agata, was allegedly kicked in the stomach by thugs in Slovakia.

Joan Moon, Nikola's English teacher, attacked the Home Office for rejecting the family's application and said she would continue campaigning for them.

"I do believe there has been a miscarriage of justice,



Nikola: family fled attacks by neo-Nazis in Slovakia

as the asylum procedure was not carried out correctly," she said. "I also believe the Home Office lulled us into a false sense of security by promising to consider the cases."

The Home Office is facing increasing criticism over its attitude towards asylum-seekers. Mr Blunkett has been forced to reconsider his new asylum proposals after they were rejected by the House of Lords this month. They include plans to site new accommodation

centres in rural areas away from support services and to educate the children of asylum-seekers outside mainstream schools.

Independent adjudicators will hear an immigration appeal next week for a family of Afghan asylum-seekers deported from Britain to Germany.

The Home Office spent an estimated £30,000 evicting the Ahmadi family from a mosque in the West Midlands where they had been seeking refuge.

However, the High Court ruled that the Home Office acted illegally in removing the family, who had fled religious and racial persecution in Afghanistan.

Asylum charities have also criticised the Government for "wasting time" sending asylum-seekers back to countries that will eventually become part of the European Union.

These include Slovakia, as well as the Czech Republic and Poland, which are due to become members of the EU in 2004.

Keith Best, the chief executive of the Immigration Advisory Service, said that it was a "waste of taxpayers' money" deporting people.

"This is rather pointless, sending people back when in a few years they will be eligible to come here anyway," he said. "They are frankly not the people who enrage the British public. The Government is picking on soft targets."

A Slovakian family, who fled their country following years of abuse at the hands of neo-Nazis, have been deported from their home in Gateshead.

SARAH LEESE looks at what the future holds for them

She went on to befriend them and, along with her husband Jeff, travelled hundreds of miles to visit them when they were taken to detention centres across the UK. She argues that although Dusan had his application for asylum rejected, Agata and Vanesa's application was not dealt with properly.

"I believe there's been a miscarriage of justice in the case of Agata and Vanesa. The Home Office lulled us into a false sense of security by promising to consider the cases substantively, so removing the threat of a judicial review."

Joan explains that the only reason the application for judicial review was withdrawn back in June was that the Home Office agreed to properly consider the family's new application.

Their eviction has left many people baffled by what appears to be an overnight deportation. According to Joan, on Saturday morning a 19-page document was faxed to the Garzovas' solicitor, Azmina Hansraj, giving the reasons for asylum refusal. But as it was the weekend, the office was empty and there was no one there to receive it.

"The next the family knew about it was when an immigration snatch squad arrived on Sunday morning with a warrant to enter their home," says Joan. "Adrian wasn't there. He was staying at a friend's house and the officials had to take Nikki to go and get him."

Their lawyer tried to get an injunction to stop the deportation and requested three days' grace to lodge the judicial review. But, according to Joan, immigration officials were only prepared to accept written documentation to stop the deportation.

However, a Home Office spokeswoman stressed all removals of asylum seekers were

lawful and only take place if the Government believes a family will not leave Britain voluntarily.

She said: "We've taken necessary, proportionate and non-discriminatory action. The appeal procedure has been exhausted and the issue under review has been concluded. Unless circumstances change then the family cannot appeal in their home country."

Tyne Bridge MP David Clelland, who was contacted by the family when they were living in his constituency, said he was as surprised as everybody at their deportation.

He said: "The first I heard of it was on Monday morning. The Garzovas did come to me for support earlier in the year and I told them to keep in touch. So when I heard nothing else from them I presumed things were ticking over."

Dusan, 32, who is a Roma Gypsy, and Agata, 34, fled Slovakia in April 2001, along with their children, after suffering persecution by racist thugs.

Agata was badly beaten by skinheads because her husband is a Roma. She was seven months' pregnant at the time and her unborn baby - Vanesa - was injured in the attack and born two months' prematurely with brain damage.

"Vanesa has since been diagnosed with cerebral palsy, which is often caused at or around the time of birth," says Joan. "Nobody can prove it was caused by the attack, but it doesn't take much to put two and two together."

When the family first arrived in the UK, they were dispersed to Gateshead, but the Home Office rejected the family's application for asylum. They were promptly moved to three different detention centres and were due to

leave Britain on a flight bound for Slovakia. However, the Home Office cancelled their flight date while their lawyer frantically continued in her efforts to secure them a haven in Gateshead.

The human rights' charity, Amnesty International, has serious concerns about the treatment of the Roma population in Slovakia. A spokesman said: "Our major concerns centre on Roma issues and torture and ill-treatment by police officials. We've had reports of a Roma man who died in police custody in suspicious circumstances and the authorities failed to provide any information to human rights monitors there."

"We also have an issue with the fact that when Romas do go to the police to report harassment by skinheads, they're not taken seriously."

Robina Qureshi, director of the charity Positive Action in Housing, which assists people from refugee communities with housing problems, also fears the Garzovas face a bleak future.

"The Garzovas have already faced discrimination and suffered persecution, which is why they fled here."

"Even in the UK where you may get people with racist beliefs, they generally don't condone skinhead behaviour. But in Slovakia, even though the official line is to condemn the skinhead culture, it's very strong and nobody dares to challenge it."

Rosina believes the Garzovas' eldest daughter, Nikki, will be placed in a special school because her dad is a Roma Gypsy. "Nikki is very intelligent and was given an award just two weeks ago for English at Bede School. She spoke no English when she came over here. But in Slovakia, she'll be placed in a school for retarded children because that's how she is seen because of her father."

"You look at the trial of Slobodan Milosovic that's currently going on in Holland and think how long it's taken to put all that evidence together. It's unbelievable that the Government has made a decision on the Garzovas so quickly."

an uncertain fate

AGATA Garzova let out a deafening cry: "I am a mother first and an immigrant second. Please give me my baby back".

Just moments before, a British security official had snatched her small daughter from her arms after she refused to board the Slovakian-bound plane.

It was the final indignity for Agata, her handcuffed husband, Dusan, and their three children, Nikki, 13, Adrian, 11, and Vanesa, two, as they were ushered on to the plane, which would lift them from the safe haven of Tyneside to an uncertain future in the east European state.

From the moment they set foot on British soil 18 months ago, the Garzova family have been shunted between detention centres in England and Scotland and their home in Gateshead. But on Sunday night, they finally lost their battle for asylum when officers from the Immigration Service swooped on their house in Sunderland Road.

The family were driven under escort to a detention centre near Gatwick Airport until seats could be found on a plane to take them to Bratislava, the Slovakian capital. For some, this would spell the end of the fight to remain in Britain. But for the Garzovas, who attracted a network of supporters across the region, the battle is far from over.

Family friend and campaigner Joan Moon says: "I'm not 100 per cent certain what'll happen next, but the escort seems to have given Agata the impression that she should get to the British Embassy in Bratislava within 28 days if she wants to appeal.

"They're still determined they want asylum in Britain, despite the treatment they've received here.

"We've had messages from lots of people prepared to continue campaigning for the family, so it would appear we've not heard the last of my extended family."

Joan, who lives in Low Fell, met the Garzova family when she was teaching English at Bede Community Centre in Old Fold, where the family were taking lessons.

A Slovakian family, who fled their country following years of abuse at the hands of neo-Nazis, have been deported from their home in Gateshead. SARAH LEESE looks at what the future holds for them

She went on to befriend them and, along with her husband Jeff, travelled hundreds of miles to visit them when they were taken to detention centres across the UK.

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"You look at the trial of Slobodan Milosevic that's currently going on in Holland and how long it's taken to put all that evidence together. It's unbelievable that the Government has made a decision on the Garzovas' case so quickly."

PPY: - top, Joan Moon with Vanesa, also pictured above

Flight to an uncertain future

Home Office move is a national disgrace, say campaigners



ENDSHIP — from left, Joan Moon, Nikki, Dusan, Agata, Adrian, baby Vanesa and Jeff Moon in happier times

Dawn raid to deport family

By **STEVE KENNEDY**
Chief Reporter

HARDLINE Home Office chiefs have 'deported' a family of refugees desperate to stay with their friends on Tyneside.

The Garzova family was flown out of the country last night after Home Secretary David Blunkett refused their bid for asylum.

The decision to send officers from the Immigration Service into their Gateshead home came just 24 hours after the Chronicle revealed how Dusan and Agata Garzova's youngest daughter Vanesa, two, had been diagnosed with cerebral palsy.

Campaigners who have fought tirelessly to keep the Slovakian family in the North East told today of their bitterness at the decision.

Family friend, Joan Moon said: "We just cannot believe this has happened. We were told they would be able to stay in Gateshead until their applications for asylum were given full consideration.

"But now they have been forcibly removed from the country without any notice at all. It is a national disgrace."

Roma gypsies Dusan, 32, and Agata, 34, who fled Slovakia with their children Nikki, 13, Adrian, 12, and Vanesa, had endured years of race hate before escaping to Britain.



VERDICT
— baby Vanesa had just been diagnosed as suffering from cerebral palsy

They won a reprieve when the Government tried to deport them earlier this year and were given a new home in Old Fold, Gateshead.

Agata had applied for asylum but neither the mum nor her solicitor was interviewed before the decision was made to send the family back. An application on behalf of Vanesa was also turned down without discussion.

Officials from the Immigration Service carried out a dawn raid on the family's home on Sunderland Road.

They were driven to a detention centre near Gatwick airport until seats could be found on a plane to take them to the Slovakian capital Bratislava.

Joan said: "This family has been persecuted for years and I have no doubt there is a very genuine risk to their lives now they have been sent back."

steve.kennedy@ncjmedia.co.uk

December 2002

Nailing press myths about refugees

Introduction

A MORI poll carried out in May this year asked respondents ~~what word the media most uses when referring to~~ asylum seekers and refugees. The top answer, mentioned by 64%, was 'illegal immigrant'. 'Bogus' was cited by 22% of respondents.

This comes as no surprise when you take even a cursory look at the British press, which is liberally peppered with the use of negative language and misinformation around the issue of asylum in the UK. Indeed, the same poll showed that respondents generally felt the media is negative on the issue.

Here are a few of the most pervasive myths which appear in British newspapers, against a few facts which put the record straight.

The Claim

"...a tide of humanity that sees Britain as the land of milk and honey."

The Sun, 22 May 2002

The Facts

Is Britain really the land of milk and honey for asylum seekers? In fact, no. Asylum seekers are not allowed to claim mainstream welfare benefits. If they are destitute, the only option for some is to apply for support with the National Asylum Support Service (NASS), the Government department responsible for supporting destitute asylum applicants. NASS support is very basic indeed. A single adult has to survive on £37.77 a week - 30% below the poverty line. It is irrational to suggest that asylum seekers embark on arduous and often dangerous journeys to the UK for that amount of money.

From 8th January the Government will withhold support from the majority of people who apply for asylum once inside the UK, rather than at a port. According to housing and welfare experts, this is likely to lead to chronic destitution and homelessness. There is no sound factual basis for discriminating against those who claim asylum once they are in the UK - in fact the Home Office's own figures show that around 65 per cent of positive decisions are given to in-country applicants.

A joint study by Oxfam and the Refugee Council shows that the asylum system, far from making the UK 'a land of milk and honey' for asylum seekers, institutionalises poverty. A report was produced on the basis of studying 40 organisations working with asylum seekers and refugees, which revealed that of those with whom they have contact, 85% experience hunger, 95% cannot afford to buy clothes or shoes and 80% are not able to maintain good health.

The report reveals that many asylum seekers do not receive the basic support they may be entitled to, because the system is badly designed, extremely bureaucratic and poorly run.

The Claim

"Asylum seekers: 9 out of 10 are common"
Daily Star, 22 May 2002

The Facts

In fact, statistics published by the Home Office figures (2nd quarter, 2002) show that well over 50 per cent of asylum seekers are given permission to stay in this country: 43 per cent of initial decisions that have been properly assessed resulted in applicants being given the right to remain in this country for their protection and around one in four appeals are successful. The fact that so many asylum seekers who are initially refused go on to win their appeals reflects the poor quality of decision making at the Home Office.

Such statements fail to recognise the connection between the situation in countries of origin and the people who seek refuge in the UK. You only need look at the latest top four nationalities - Iraq, Zimbabwe, Afghanistan and Somalia - of those seeking asylum to see that this increase in positive decisions proves that the majority of asylum seekers are fleeing for their lives from harsh and oppressive regimes and severe ethnic conflict. It is unfortunate that the same government which is planning a possible war against Iraq, citing its oppressive political regime as good cause, at the same time fails to recognise the reasons why people flee such regimes.

The Claim

"...illegal asylum seekers"
Evening Standard, 24 September 2002

The Facts

By definition, there is no such thing as an 'illegal asylum seeker'. The UK has signed the 1951 Convention on Refugees, which means that by law, anyone has the right to apply for asylum in the UK and remain until a final decision on their asylum application has been made. The Refugee Council has taken the issue of this particular quote to the Press Complaints Commission for this reason.

In January 2002, the Advertising Standards Authority upheld a complaint against a polling company, which sent out a fax referring to asylum seekers as 'illegals', as racist, offensive and misleading.

The fact that an asylum seeker may have entered the country illegally does not mean their case lacks credibility. It is virtually impossible for people fleeing persecution to reach Britain without resorting to the use of false documents. In recognition of this fact, Article 31 of the 1951 Convention on Refugees prohibits governments from penalising refugees who use false documents.

The Claim

"Losing the war on asylum crime"
Daily Mail, 26 November 2002

The Facts

One of many alarmist headlines implying that all asylum seekers are criminals. A report published by the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) recently confirmed that there is no evidence for a higher rate of criminality among refugees and asylum seekers. In fact, according to ACPO, having fled danger in their home country, asylum seekers are more likely to become victims of crime in the UK. There have been countless attacks on asylum seekers around Britain, including the murder of an asylum seeker in Glasgow in 2001 and in Sunderland earlier this year. The murder in Glasgow prompted the UN High Commissioner for Refugees to condemn the British media for provoking racial hatred.

The Claim

"Bogus asylum seekers are draining millions from the NHS"
Daily Express, 26 November 2002

The Facts

This statement is completely unsubstantiated. What is more, asylum seekers are entitled to NHS services, like other residents and visitors to the UK.

This idea ignores the enormous contribution that asylum seekers, refugees and other immigrants make to the economic and cultural life of the UK. Refugees bring with them a wealth of skills and experience - even the Home Office has recognised this and made a commitment, through its Integration Unit, to put such skills to good use. The NHS relies heavily on foreign labour - according to the Greater London Authority, 23% of doctors and 47% of nurses working within the NHS were born outside the UK.

According to a recent Home Office study carried out last year, migrants, including asylum seekers and refugees - are far from being a burden on UK tax payers. On the contrary, in 1999-2000, they made a net fiscal contribution of approximately £2.5 billion, worth 1p on income tax.

Research carried out by Personnel Today in November 2001, found that 9 out of 10 employers want to take on refugees to meet skills' shortages, but do not due to ignorance of the law and confusing Home Office paperwork.

Despite such evidence and that of the contributions, real and potential, the Government has recently reversed legislation so that asylum seekers are now prevented from working. Home Office research has shown that asylum seekers would by far prefer to support themselves than be supported by the Government, yet the law prevents them from doing so. Sadly, it is asylum seekers who are demonised for 'draining' the state, when, despite commitments on refugee integration, they are discouraged from being independent.

The Claim

"Britain the No.1 refugee magnet"
The Sun, 14 September 2002

The Facts

No. 1? Even within the EU, the UK ranked 10th in terms of asylum applications in relation to the overall population in 2001. The truth about refugee movements is the world's poorest countries both produce and bear responsibility for most refugees. During 1992-2001, 86 per cent of the world's estimated 12 million refugees originated from developing countries, whilst such countries provided asylum to 72 per cent of the global population (source: UNHCR). If you consider global refugee and asylum seeking populations in relation to the host country's size, population and wealth, the UK ranks 32nd. Taking the greatest burden are Iran, Burundi and Guinea. A recent MORI poll demonstrates the impact of such misinformation, showing that people vastly overestimate the numbers of asylum seekers and refugees in the UK - on average people think that 23% of the world's refugees and asylum seekers are in the UK, more than 10 times greater than the reality, which is actually less than 2%. The idea that Britain or indeed any other European country is a 'soft touch' is simply not true. As European countries from Denmark and Holland to Switzerland introduce increasingly tougher immigration controls, it is extremely difficult to gain entry to Europe at all. If we compare the numbers of asylum seekers granted protection in the UK with those in Canada, the UK emerges as far from being a 'soft touch'. In 2001, Canada granted protection to 97% of Afghan asylum applicants, where the UK granted only 19%. Somali applicants had a 92% success rate in Canada, where in the UK it was only 34%. 85% of Colombian applicants in Canada were granted protection, against a mere 3% in the UK.

The Claim

"'Asylum rejects' scandal: 90 per cent stay anyway"
Daily Star, 16 September 2002

The Facts

Asylum seekers are not cheats because they have been unsuccessful with their asylum application - after all, they have exercised a fundamental human right. The asylum process is not easy: the criteria set out in the 1951 Convention on Refugees, against which asylum claims are examined, are very strict. At the same time, Home Office decisions are often based on inaccuracies, failures to probe certain issues, and an overemphasis on trying to discredit the applicant during the asylum interview. The Home Office's poor standards of decision-making have been well-documented by [Asylum Aid](#).

A large number of asylum seekers have their applications refused on purely procedural grounds. Many are unable to complete the Statement of Evidence Form, in which they have to outline, in English, their reasons for seeking asylum, within the required ten-day deadline. 21,220 applications were refused on non-compliance grounds in 2001, representing a fifth of total refusals; such refusals have nothing to do with the substance or credibility of a claim. There are clear reasons why the Home Office may not be able to remove someone. Whilst the person may be fully compliant with the system, they may be ill, pregnant or indeed the country of origin may not accept them back without documentation. The Refugee Council has set out [principles for removals](#).

Further information

Annual UK asylum statistics up to Q1 2002

8th April 2002

NEWS · BBC · CO · UK / 1 / HI / UK

Asylum seekers' vouchers scrapped



David Blunkett decided to pay asylum seekers in cash

Asylum seekers will receive cash payments from Monday, as the widely criticised voucher scheme is scrapped.

Home Secretary David Blunkett brought forward abolition of the payments following a riot and fire at the showpiece Yarl's Wood detention centre in February.

The move has been welcomed as a "big victory" by campaign groups, which claimed the vouchers deprived refugees of their dignity.

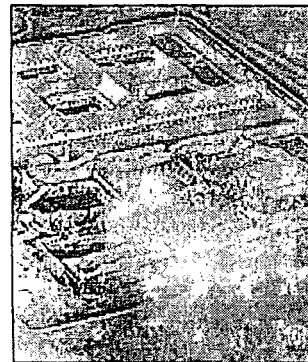
But they are angry at a small rise in the overall value of the payments, claiming they are worth a third less than Income Support.

Before the Yarl's Wood fire Mr Blunkett had planned to end the voucher system in the autumn.

The vouchers were introduced under his predecessor, Jack Straw, and could be exchanged at designated shops for food and clothing.

But apart from the claims about the stigma attached to the vouchers, there were also practical problems as many supermarkets refused to give change for goods bought with them.

Although several options for replacements were considered, including automated credit transfers, cash payments through post offices were chosen as the most practical method.



The riot brought forward the scheme's end

The subsistence payments will also increase in value.

Asylum seekers aged 18 to 24, who previously received a combination of vouchers and cash worth £28.95-a-week, will receive a cash payment of £29.89.

The over-25s, who previously received a package worth £36.54, will get a cash payment of £37.77.

Nick Hardwick, the Refugee Council's chief executive, welcomed the end of the "humiliating and degrading voucher system".

The voucher system

He said: "It is a big victory for everyone who campaigned on this issue."

But Mr Hardwick also expressed concern that the payments were still much lower than Income Support.

was introduced on the false assumption that people were coming here to get access to benefits

And he warned that new rules could force recipients to move into government-sponsored accommodation far from friends and family.

Refugee Council

He added: "The voucher system was introduced on the false assumption that people were coming here to get access to benefits."

"This should banish the idea that making life in the UK even tougher for people fleeing persecution can reduce numbers coming."

'Restore dignity'

Liberal Democrat home affairs spokesman Simon Hughes welcomed the end of the "degrading, discriminatory and impractical" vouchers.

He said: "The new, more flexible system for providing necessary resources for asylum seekers is welcome."

T&G general secretary Bill Morris said: "It is right that the Government ends the humiliation of the vouchers and restore some dignity to asylum seekers. We welcome that."

[\[refugee council\]](#) [\[publications\]](#) [\[news\]](#) [\[info centre\]](#) [\[get involved\]](#) [\[diary\]](#) [\[site a-z\]](#) [\[contact\]](#)



[current news]

July 2001

Department of Health begins
funding bids from
organisations
4 April 2002

'Grace period' of support for
asylum seekers to be extended
20 March 2002

Government plans to scrap
this April
27 February 2002

Home Secretary
to be scrapped
after fire at
Yarl's Wood
27 February 2002

Government plans to withdraw
'support only' package for
asylum seekers
14 February 2002

Campaign to end vouchers gathers momentum

As pressure builds against the system, the Refugee Council and Oxfam have launched the latest phase of their joint campaign to scrap the Government's voucher scheme for asylum seekers.

The new joint Refugee Council-Oxfam card informs supporters of why vouchers should be scrapped and encourages them to write to their MP, asking him/her to press the Home Secretary to replace them with a fairer and more efficient system.

The voucher system has attracted widespread criticism from many organisations, including Save the Children, the British Medical Association and the Local Government Association, forcing the Government to agree to a review of the system at the Labour party conference last autumn. The outcome of this review is now expected later this year.

As ministers assess the findings of the review, it has been reported that within Whitehall a debate is currently taking place over the future of vouchers. Both the Refugee Council and Oxfam, therefore, believe it is critical that all those who oppose vouchers, including MPs from all parties, make their voices heard.

Nick Hardwick, Chief Executive of the Refugee Council, commented, "We're hardpushed to find any Labour MP or Minister who supports the voucher scheme. In fact, everyone we talk to privately admits it has been a big mistake and is indefensible."

In a public statement in the Lords earlier this month, the new Minister for Citizenship and Immigration, Lord Rooker, reinforced the case against vouchers, by admitting it leaves asylum seekers "feeling that they [are] being looked at and considered to be different because they did not have proper money."

The voucher system was introduced in April last year. Vouchers have a value of 70% of basic income support - this is just £36.54 a week for a single adult - to meet basic living needs whilst asylum seekers await a decision on their application. Vouchers can only be used in designated shops, which means that impoverished asylum seekers cannot shop in the cheapest shops and markets. In what is considered to be one of the worse excesses of the system, supermarkets cannot give change on vouchers. In a letter to the Guardian, Sainsbury's publicly admitted that this means supermarkets "profit at the expense of asylum seekers".

Token Gestures, a report published by the Refugee Council, the Transport and General Workers' Union and Oxfam, provides compelling evidence of the injustices of the voucher system. The report contains a survey which provides the first detailed picture of the impact of the system on asylum seekers and the organisations working with them. Serious inefficiencies in the system are reported, including delays which have meant asylum seekers without any alternative means of support waiting for vouchers. The report also confirmed fears that vouchers send out negative messages about asylum seekers at a time when there is already much ignorance on asylum. One girl from Afghanistan said the experience is "like getting a stamp saying you don't belong". Asylum seekers were shown to experience hostility from other shoppers and were singled out in areas where police report a rising incidence of racial harassment.

These are just some of the manifold problems associated with the voucher scheme. Unfortunately, destitute asylum seekers have little choice: they are unable to work for the first six months whilst they wait for a decision on their application. According to Nick Hardwick, "The Government should put an end to this shameful scheme. Asylum seekers should have access to money - preferably by being allowed to work for a fair wage, or by cash support if they are unable to do so."

Find out more on the [campaign against vouchers](#)

Read a [press statement on the campaign](#) to put a stop to vouchers..

100

The men making millions from refugees' misery

'Asylum industry' cashes in on vouchers and dispersals
Special report: refugees in Britain

Martin Bright and Conal Walsh
Sunday September 2, 2001
The Observer

Dozens of asylum barons are making fortunes from Britain's refugee crisis, an Observer investigation can reveal. The transport, dispersal, housing and detention of people fleeing persecution has turned into a giant get-rich-quick scheme subsidised by the taxpayer.

One of those set to gain most is colourful French catering billionaire Pierre Bellon, whose Sodexho company runs the controversial asylum vouchers scheme.

Accounts for Sodexho-Pass Limited, the British company he set up to do this work, show it was paid more than £1 million last year by the Home Office. Sodexho has told The Observer that this year it will receive £1.5m to print and distribute around £50m of vouchers, which can be exchanged at supermarkets for food and other essentials.

Bellon is already one of Europe's richest men, with an estimated fortune of more than £1.3 billion.

He went into the private prisons business in 1987, winning a lucrative French government contract, and caused outrage by saying: 'I used to be in the hotel business, but with prisons you can guarantee a 100 per cent occupancy rate.'

Ivan Semenoff, chief executive of Sodexho's worldwide voucher business, said yesterday that administration costs swallow most of the money paid by the Home Office. The company was using the scheme to break into the lucrative UK voucher business. 'We saw this as an opportunity,' he said.

Semenoff said the firm recognised the system was controversial and planned changes to soften its effect include a name change for the vouchers: 'In future we will call them "Welcome Passes".'

Vouchers are just one way that Sodexho makes money from refugees. In a detention centre to be opened near Heathrow on 20 September by its subsidiary, UK Detention Services, the company is planning what refugee groups have described as a 'slave-labour scheme'.

A Home Office document obtained by the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns shows that the Government intends to suspend the minimum wage at the Harmondsworth centre. Refugees will be expected to do the work of painters, cleaners and catering there for only £12 a week, equivalent to 34 pence an hour.

If they refuse work but comply with an 'agreed activity programme' they will be paid £6. If they will not cooperate at all, they will be given £4 for cleaning their rooms.

The Refugee Action group challenged the Government to justify plans for education at the centre. A Home Office document says 'children under school-leaving age will have 17.5 hours of study per week'. Yet the Department for Education recommends 25 hours a week.

The Observer has established that Sodexho's Bellon is just one of a number of businessmen cleaning up from the asylum crisis.

In July, Immigration Minister Jeff Rooker admitted the asylum system cost the Home Office £15.4m in 2000 on top of the £26.1m paid in vouchers.

Home Secretary David Blunkett has come under increasing pressure to scrap the scheme, which refugee groups believe has raised racial tension.

Protests led by Bill Morris of the Transport and General Workers Union forced the Government to agree to a review of the system at last year's Labour Party conference. But it is now thought the vouchers will stay because of pressure from Downing Street.

The Home Office last night refused to say how much compensation it would have to pay Sodexo if its three-year contract was cancelled.

Another foreign billionaire with a foot in the British asylum market is American George Wackenhut, whose Wackenhut Corporation runs private prisons across the world. Last year Wackenhut UK won the transport contract for the Government's asylum dispersal scheme, and its coaches now carry refugees around the country.

Wackenhut UK accounts for last year, which also includes its private prison and security business, showed a turnover of £22m. The Home Office refused to say how much of this came from the Government for the dispersal business.

Ministers are concerned about the dozen or so firms which won multi-million pound contracts to house dispersed refugees.

One of the smaller ones, Adelphi Hotels, based in Hove, East Sussex increased its profits from £180,000 to £1.4m after winning a dispersal contract in April last year. Michael Holland, the main shareholder, gave himself a £250,000 pay rise.

Companies House has confirmed it is taking action against two companies, Clearsprings and Landmark Liverpool, which have so far failed to produce annual accounts. Clearsprings confirmed it had a turnover of £2m last year, mostly Home Office money.

Owned by Graham King, an Essex gaming tycoon, it had no experience in housing or refugee work before it took its state contract in April 2000. It now claims to be 'the fastest growing property company in the UK'.

Councils in the North of England have complained to the Home Office that private contractors such as Clearsprings have been dumping asylum seekers in sub-standard accommodation without telling them.

Landmark owns two crumbling tower blocks in Liverpool, where residents have complained of harassment by the firm and staged a hunger strike.

The Liberal Democrat leader of Liverpool council, Richard Kemp, said: 'The Government are responsible. They gave contracts to these companies who are dumping asylum-seekers in our cities.'

APPENDIX IV.
**Statistics, Figures, and Tables ‘Migration, asylum seekers, and
refugees)**

(www.homeoffice.gov.uk, www.refugeecouncil.co.uk, and ERRC Budapest)

Detention

As of 29 June 2002, there were 1,720 people detained within the UK under Immigration Act powers – a marginal increase to the last figures available at the end of March 2002. Of those, 1,440 were asylum seekers – a 5% decrease. Of those, 1,240 were male and 200 female. At the same time, 63% of asylum applicants had been in detention for up to two months, whereas 11% had been in detention for at least six months or longer than a year.

Detention by nationality

Table 11: Main nationalities of asylum seekers being detained in March and June 2002

Nationality	detained asylum seekers at the end of March 2002	- +	detained asylum seekers at the end of June 2002
Czech Republic	50	+	180
Fed Rep of Yugoslavia	105	+	120
Pakistan	105	-	100
Nigeria	95	+	100
Turkey	75	+	100
Sri Lanka	75		75
Albania	65		65
India	65	-	55
Algeria	65	-	50
China	45*	+	50
Total top-ten	745	+	895
Other nationalities	625	-	545

* not in the top ten at that time

Removals

Between April and June 2002, the Home Office removed a total of 3,120 unsuccessful principal asylum applicants and their dependants – the highest number ever and a 6 per cent increase since the end of March 2002. There is currently no nationality breakdown for removals for the second quarter of 2002 available. However, the Home Office estimate that around 16% of those removed were nationals from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, 12% were from Eastern European countries and 10 percent were from either Afghanistan, India or Pakistan.

Table 12: Removal of asylum applicants, 4th quarter 2001 to 1st quarter 2002

	Q4, 2001	Q1, 2002	Q2, 2002
Main applicants	2,450	2,445	2,585
Dependants	485	480	535
Total	2,935	2,920	3,120

*Note: Analyses are based on Home Office statistics at: _____
All figures are rounded to the nearest five and all percentages rounded to the nearest whole number. This can lead to discrepancies in totals and with different tables.*

	Quarter 3, 2001		Quarter 4, 2001		Quarter 1, 2002	
Allowed	2,190	20%	2,690	21%	3,165	23%
Dismissed	8,510	78%	9,690	77%	10,500	75%
Withdrawn	250	2%	275	2%	340	2%

Detention

As of 30 March 2002, there were 1,575 people detained within the UK under Immigration Act powers, of which 1,370 were asylum seekers. Of those, 1,185 were male and 185 female.

Detention by nationality

Table 11: Main nationalities of asylum seekers being detained as at 30 March 2002

Nationality	Total detainees	of whom asylum seekers
Pakistan	115	105
Fed Rep of Yugoslavia	105	105
Nigeria	115	95
Sri Lanka	80	75
Turkey	75	75
Albania	70	65
Algeria	85	65
India	80	65
Czech Republic	50	50
Ukraine	60	50
Other nationalities	740	620

Removals

Removals increased throughout 2001 and into quarter 1 in 2002. There were 2,445 main applicants removed in quarter 1, a similar number to quarter 4, 2001. However, the number of removals in quarter 1 marked an 18 per cent increase over the figure for the corresponding quarter in 2001 (2,070). Individuals originating from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia accounted for 22 per cent of the total removals in quarter 4, 2001, while the presence of Afghanistan on the list is also notable.

Table 12: Removal of asylum seeker, quarter 3, 2001 to quarter 1, 2002

	Quarter 3, 2001	Quarter 4, 2001	Quarter 1, 2002
Main applicants	2,340	2,450	2,445
Dependants	515	485	480
Total	2,860	2,935	2,920

Table 13: Main nationalities of principal applicants removed in quarter 4, 2001

Nationality	Number removed
Fed Rep Yugoslavia	545
Czech Republic	180
Poland	155
India	130
Albania	120
Romania	115
Pakistan	85
Ukraine	75
Nigeria	70
Afghanistan	65
Other nationalities	920

Note: Analyses are based on Home Office statistics at: www.homeoffice.gov.uk.

All figures are rounded to the nearest five and all percentages rounded to the nearest whole number. This can lead to discrepancies in totals and with different tables.

Asylum statistics 1999 to 2002 first quarter (Q1)

New asylum applications

In 2001, the UK received 11% fewer asylum applications than in 2000. The monthly average for the first quarter of 2002 is slightly higher at 6,506 (2001: 5,975). The majority of asylum applicants lodge their asylum claim once they are already in the UK rather than at port on arrival.

	Q1 2002	2001	2000	1999
In-country	46,200	51,235	41,700	
Port	25,500	24,805	29,455	
Total	71,700	76,040	71,160	

European context

In terms of asylum applications per head of population, the UK ranked:

2001: 10th

2000: 10th

1999: 9th

out of 25 countries (source: www.unhcr.ch)

Annual Comparisons - 1999 to 2001

Year	Average per month	Total
1999	5,930	71,160
2000	6,887	80,315
2001	5,975	71,700

Top 10 countries of origin

The vast majority of asylum applicants come from countries with well-documented instances of serious forms of persecution. The nationalities listed below directly reflect the turbulent situations across the world today. In 2001, the highest percentage rise in asylum applications came from Zimbabwe and Afghanistan - both countries having experienced high profile persecution and conflict.

	Q1 2002	2001	2000	1999
Iraq	2,840	6,805	7,475	1,800
Afghanistan	2,350	9,190	5,555	3,980
Zimbabwe	1,495	2,085	1,010	230
Somalia	1,295	6,500	6,020	7,495
Sri Lanka	1,240	5,545	6,395	5,130
China	915	2,415	4,000	2,625
Turkey	650	3,740	3,990	2,850
Pakistan	645	2,810	3,165	2,615
Iran	600	3,450	5,610	1,320
Federal Republic of Yugoslavia	580	3,190	6,070	11,465

Asylum decisions

The positive recognition rate for asylum applications decided between January and March 2002 has increased by 11% to 42%. 31% of asylum applicants whose cases were decided received a positive decision in 2001. The Refugee Council also estimates that at least 51% of applicants were successful subsequently - either at different appeal levels or where the Home Office overturned its own initial refusal decision of its own accord.

	Q1 2002	2001	2000	1999
Refugee status (%)	11	11	15	43
ELR (%)	31	20	16	13
Positive decision rate (%)	42	31	31	56
Initial refusals (%)	58	69	69	44

In the first quarter of 2002, 23% of appeals determined by adjudicators at the Immigration Appellate Authority (IAA: www.iaa.gov.uk) were allowed. Some decisions were also overturned at the second appeal level at the Immigration Appeals Tribunal.

Many asylum decisions are overturned but not recorded in the official statistics. The Home Office is often forced to concede cases after an appeal has been lodged but before an adjudicator can make a determination. In many cases, this happens even before the appeal is referred to the appeal authorities. The Home Office admits that in circumstances where we change our initial decision we do not adjust the statistics afterwards (source: Channel 4 News investigation - 25 January 2000).

Asylum applications refused on non-compliance grounds

Refusal on non-compliance grounds results from failure to submit the Statement of Evidence Form (SEF) in time, failure to complete the form in full and in English, and failure to attend or late arrival at interviews. Currently, asylum applicants can only complete the form - where they have to outline their basic reasons for applying for asylum - in English only and have to submit it to the Home Office within ten working days. In 2000, as a result of the dispersal policy, non-compliance refusals increased dramatically by 2354% compared to 1,085 in 1999, as asylum applicants had immense difficulties getting advice in completing the form and submitting the form in time after being dispersed hundreds of miles from their original arrival point.

	Q1 2002	2001	2000	1999
Refusals on non-compliance grounds	3,210	21,480	26,630	1,085

Decisions on individual nationalities

Statistics relating to decisions on individual nationalities are [available here](#). You will need Acrobat software to download this document.

Asylum applications awaiting an initial decision

	Q1 2002	2001	2000	1999
Applications awaiting an initial decision	35,500	39,400	87,800	119,700

Asylum appeals

	Q1 2002	2001	2000	1999
Determined	13,300	43,415	19,395	19,460
Allowed	3,165 (23%)	8,155 (19%)	3,340 (17%)	5,280 (27%)
Dismissed	10,500 (75%)	34,440 (79%)	15,580 (80%)	11,135 (57%)
Withdrawn	340 (2%)	825 (2%)	475 (2%)	3,050 (16%)

Annual UK asylum statistics up to Q1 2002

The Home Office started collecting regular asylum statistics in 1980.

New asylum applications :

Year	New asylum applications	granted refugee status or ELR
1980	2,352	1,385
1981	2,425	1,751
1982	4,225	2,038
1983	4,296	2,124
1984	3,869	1,428
1985	5,444	2,987
1986	4,266	2,450
1987	4,256	1,797
1988	3,998	2,206
1989	11,640	6,070
1990	26,205	3,320
1991	44,840	2,695
1992	24,605	16,440
1993	22,370	12,715
1994	32,830	4,485
1995	43,965	5,705
1996	29,640	7,295
1997	32,500	7,100
1998	46,010	9,255
1999	71,160	10,280
2000	80,315	21,870
2001	71,700	30,470

2002 Asylum statistics

Quarter	New asylum applications	Granted refugee status or ELR
Q1	19,520	8,145

According to the Home Office estimates, refugee groups coming to the UK from the 1950s until 1980 included:

- 250,000 Polish nationals (1940s and 1950s)
- 50,000 other Eastern Europeans (1940s and 1950s)
- 17,000 Hungarian nationals (1956)
- 5,000 Czech nationals (1968)
- 3,000 Chileans (1970s)
- 19,000 South East Asians (1970s)
- 40,000 from over 50 countries who sought asylum on an individual basis.

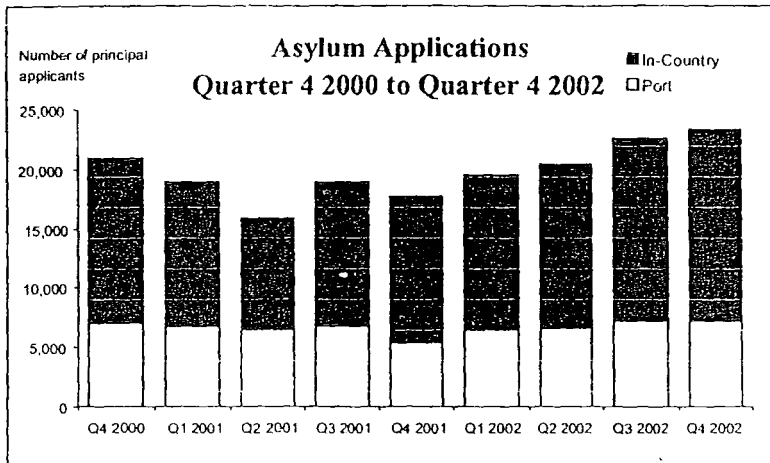
Since the 1980s, the UK has also accepted the following refugee groups as part of Government programmes:

- 5,820 South East Asians (1985-1995)
- 2,500 Bosnias (1992-1997)
- 4,345 Kosovars (1999)

Applications

● Applications: 23,385, 4% higher than previous quarter

- Applications for asylum in the UK in Q4 were 4% higher than the previous quarter (22,560) and the highest quarterly level on record. October showed the highest monthly level on record (8,900), but applications fell in November (7,815) and December (6,670).
- 85,865 applications for asylum in the UK in 2002, 20% more than 2001. Applications to the EU (excluding Italy) fell by 1% in 2002.
- Including dependants⁽¹⁾, the number of applicants was estimated to be 30,100 in Q4 and 110,700 in 2002.



Asylum applications received	
Q4 2000	20,855
Q1 2001	18,905
Q2 2001	15,895
Q3 2001	18,860
Q4 2001	17,705
Q1 2002	19,520
Q2 2002	20,400
Q3 2002	22,560
Q4 2002	23,385
Oct-02	8,900
Nov-02	7,815
Dec-02	6,670
Data for 2001 and 2002 are provisional. Data rounded to nearest 5 and may not sum due to rounding.	

● Largest nationalities: Iraq, Zimbabwe, Somalia

- The number of applications from Iraqi nationals increased by 2% from Q3 and remained the highest applicant nationality for the fourth consecutive quarter.
- Applications from Zimbabweans increased by almost a third, but fell sharply in December, partly due to the introduction of visa regimes. Applications from Jamaicans almost doubled in Q4 from 305 in Q3.
- Applications decreased this quarter from Afghans, Somalis, Sri Lankans and FRY. Applications from Czech Republic fell by 79% from 620 in Q3 to 130 in Q4.
- The top 5 applicant nationalities in 2002 were Iraq (14,940), Zimbabwe (7,695), Afghanistan (7,380), Somalia (6,680) and China (3,735).
- In 2002, Iraqi applications (14,940) more than doubled, and Zimbabwean applications (7,695) were more than triple the 2001 level. Falling significantly in 2002 were applications from Sri Lankans (-42%), nationals of FRY (-29%) and Afghans (-18%).

Top 10 applicant nationalities Quarter 4 2002	
Iraq	4,375
Zimbabwe	2,750
Somalia	1,835
Afghanistan	1,350
China	905
Iran	830
Turkey	815
Dem. Rep. of Congo	705
Pakistan	565
Jamaica	565
Other Nationalities	8,690
Total	23,385
Provisional data Data rounded to nearest 5 and may not sum due to rounding.	

⁽¹⁾ Subject to revision. Estimated using ratio of dependants per principal applicant based on 2001 data. Early indications are that the revised figure for 2002 may be a few thousand lower. It is planned to produce more precise figures including the number of dependants in a Home Office Statistical Bulletin *Asylum Statistics United Kingdom 2002*, to be published later this year. Also see background note 6 (page 10).

Removal of Asylum Seekers

● 2,630 principal applicants removed in Q4; 3,730 including dependants

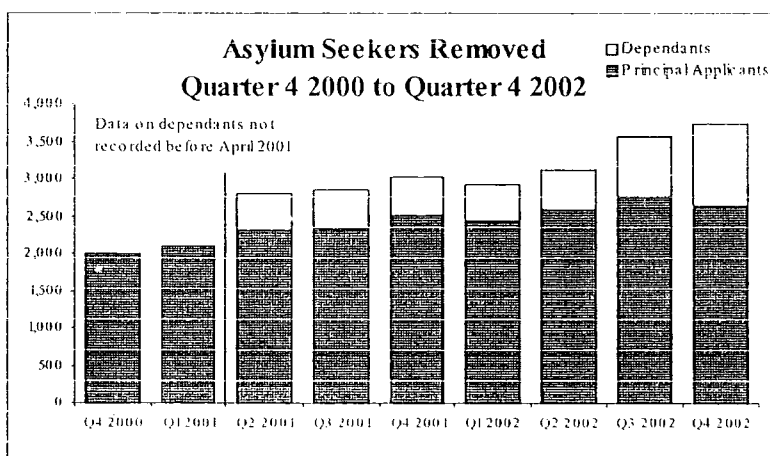
- Provisional data show that there were 2,630 principal applicants removed from the UK in Q4. This was 4% less than Q3 (2,750), 4% more than in the same period last year (2,520).
- Including dependants, a total of 3,730 asylum seekers were removed in Q4. This was an increase of 5% compared to the previous quarter (3,565) and 23% more than in Q4 2001 (3,025).
- Nationality data are not currently available for Q4, but estimates of the main nationalities of principal applicants removed in Q3 are shown below. The top ten nationalities removed accounted for 63% of the total.
- Provisionally, 10,410 principal applicants were removed in 2002, an increase of 12% on 2001 (9,285) and the highest annual total on record. Including dependants, 13,335 asylum seekers were removed in 2002.

Asylum removals ⁽¹⁾			
	Principal Applicants		Dependants ⁽²⁾
			Total
Q4 2000	1,990	n/a	n/a
Q1 2001	2,100	n/a	n/a
Q2 2001	2,325	475	2,800
Q3 2001	2,340	515	2,860
Q4 2001	2,520	500	3,025
Q1 2002	2,445	480	2,920
Q2 2002	2,585	535	3,120
Q3 2002	^(p) 2,750	815	3,565
Q4 2002	^(p) 2,630	1,100	3,730
Oct-02	^(p) 925	335	1,255
Nov-02	^(p) 905	330	1,235
Dec-02	^(p) 800	435	1,235

⁽¹⁾ Data rounded to nearest 5 and may not sum due to rounding.
⁽²⁾ Provisional data.
⁽³⁾ Includes persons departing 'voluntarily' after enforcement action had been initiated against them and persons leaving under Assisted Voluntary Return Programmes run by the IOM.
⁽⁴⁾ Data on dependants of asylum seekers have only been collected since April 2001.

Top 10 nationalities of asylum seekers removed ⁽¹⁾	
Quarter 3 2002 ⁽²⁾	
Fed Rep of Yugoslavia	635
Czech Republic	190
Romania	160
Albania	140
Poland	130
Afghanistan	110
Sri Lanka	110
Turkey	100
Pakistan	85
Nigeria	75
Other nationalities	1,020
Total	2,750

⁽¹⁾ Data relate to principal applicants only.
⁽²⁾ Nationality data have been estimated because of various data quality issues on the IRO databases.



Roma and asylum in the West

THE tables which follow show the number of asylum seekers from Central and Eastern Europe in some Western European countries and Canada in 1997 and 1998. It is not possible to obtain statistics showing the numbers of Roma amongst each group, as many of the relevant bodies are not allowed to record applicants' ethnicity. However, non-governmental organisations in several of the countries concerned express the belief that the majority of applicants from Central and Eastern Europe are Roma. This is particularly true for the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia, as well as for Romania and the countries of the former Yugoslavia.

There are two sets of figures below. The first shows the total number of principal applicants for 1997 and 1998. The principal applicant is the person who makes the asylum application and who may have dependants, but it is generally not possible to obtain figures which would include these. The second set of figures shows initial decisions made on applications for asylum, by country. Generally, a government body makes an initial decision on an application based on an interview or application form. After this decision, the applicant has varying rights to appeal, depending on the country of application. Particularly in the United Kingdom, Roma asylum seekers have been considerably more successful at appeal than at initial decision stage.

1998 Principal applicants

	Canada ¹	France	Germany ²	United Kingdom ³
Bosnia-Herzegovina	14	294	2586	160
Bulgaria	223	343	310	165
Croatia	11	17	446	335
Czech Republic	177	13 ⁴	71	515
Hungary	875	12	25	0 ⁵
Macedonia	13	80	1228	50
Poland	11	11	90	1585
Romania	11	1077	535	1015
Slovakia	11	31	249	835
Yugoslavia	11	1133 ⁶	54,379	7385 ⁷

1997 Principal applicants

	Canada	France	Germany	United Kingdom
Bosnia-Herzegovina	10	250	2345	170
Bulgaria	11	871	1244	545
Croatia	10	13	565	150
Czech Republic	1222	5	94	240
Hungary	300	21	30	0
Macedonia	35	91	1704	20
Poland	157	22	207	565
Romania	403	5201	1180	605
Slovakia	15	41	508	290
Yugoslavia	277	717	30,962	1865

1998 Initial decisions: positive decisions/total number of decisions

	Canada	France ⁸	Germany ⁹	United Kingdom ¹⁰
Bosnia-Herzegovina	9/16		36/4425	45/95
Bulgaria	119/202		0/444	0/520
Croatia	4/8		4/666	25/155
Czech Republic	739/1049		0/67	0/180
Hungary	153/397		0/25	0/5
Macedonia	11/27		2/1332	5/10
Poland	136/200		0/102	0/1070
Romania	107/529		1/917	3/1160
Slovakia	5/25		0/301	0/335
Yugoslavia	226/277		1134/41,460	935/1570

1997 Initial decisions: positive decisions/total number of decisions

	Canada	France	Germany	United Kingdom
Bosnia-Herzegovina	18/23	103/232	32/24,548	235/385
Bulgaria	104/216	14/573	1/1496	5/530
Croatia	9/23	5/19	3/419	170/340
Czech Republic	19/296	0/4	0/100	0/210
Hungary	8/60	0/17	1/33	0
Macedonia	1/19	6/69	5/1739	0/5
Poland	15/76	0/20	2/214	0/865
Romania	104/566	25/4548	1/1672	5/845
Slovakia	0/11	2/14	0/416	0/375
Yugoslavia	231/371	213/764	709/28,717	1355/1945

Sources: Canada: Immigration and Refugee Board; France: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR); Germany: UNHCR/German Red Cross; United Kingdom: UNHCR/Home Office Research and Statistics Directorate

NOTES

- Figures for applicants from Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia and Yugoslavia in Canada are for fiscal years. The number for 1998 covers applications and decisions made between April 1 and December 31, 1998; the numbers for 1997 run from April 1, 1997 to March 31, 1998.
- German application statistics include follow-up applications after an initial application has been refused.
- All figures from the United Kingdom are rounded to the nearest five.
- This figure includes persons registering themselves with the authorities as citizens of the former Czechoslovakia.
- In total there were only one or two applications made by nationals of Hungary in the United Kingdom in 1997 and 1998. Five decisions, all negative, were made over the two years.
- Figures for Yugoslavs in France include those declared as citizens of Former Yugoslavia.
- In statistics provided for the United Kingdom, there is a further category of "other Yugoslav", which may include applicants from any of the former Yugoslav republics. For 1998, the number of "other Yugoslav" applicants was 25; in 1997 this number was 30.
- Information on decisions taken in 1998 in France was not yet available at the time of writing.
- Number of positive decisions in Germany includes those recognised as refugees under article 16(a)(1) of the Constitution, as well as those given prevention from *refoulement* according to the 1951 Convention. The figure does not include those which were temporarily protected from return for humanitarian reasons, nor any other protected status available under German law.
- Number of positive decisions in the United Kingdom does not include grants of "exceptional leave to remain", a temporary solution.

ROMA RIGHTS NEWSLETTER of the EUROPEAN ROMA RIGHTS CENTER (1999)
Petrova, Cahn and Kiuranou (eds.) Budapest: ERRC

